



小鹿斑比

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〔奥地利〕费利克斯·萨尔腾 著
虞风文 译

译林出版社

BAMBI: A LIFE IN THE WOODS

小鹿斑比

在这部森林生命故事中，诗意与哲理并存。
——《纽约时报》

Felix Salten

〔奥地利〕费利克斯·萨尔腾 著 虞风文 译

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[奥地利] 费利克斯·萨尔腾 著
虞凤文 译

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作 者 〔奥地利〕费利克斯·萨尔腾

译 者 虞凤文

责任编辑 王振华

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小鹿斑比（英文版）

献给凯特，我的爱人

第一章

他降生在灌木丛中央，那是一片小小的林间空地。在这座森林里，有很多这样的空地，它们看起来像是敞开的，好似一览无余，但实际上四面八方都被遮挡得严严实实。那块空地实在是不大，也就刚好容得下他和他的妈妈。

他站在那里，瘦弱的小腿儿颤颤悠悠，双眼蒙眬地望着前方，初生的眼睛什么也看不清。小家伙垂下小脑袋，哆嗦了好一会儿，一副茫然无措的样子。

“多漂亮的小孩啊！”一只喜鹊大声地欢呼。

从空地上方飞过，她被鹿妈妈分娩时发出的低吟声吸引住了，于是停靠在附近树枝上观看。她不停地赞叹道：“多漂亮的小孩啊！”谁也没有回应她，但她还是自顾自地说开了：“一想到他就这么站了起来，还会走路，我就觉得神奇！真是有意思！长这么大，我从来没有亲眼见过这样的事情呢。当然我还很年轻，你要知道我从鸟巢里飞出来还不到一年哩。不过，我还是觉着这种事太令人吃惊了。这样一个小孩子，刚出生不到一分钟，就能开始走路了。不得不说这实在是一件非比寻常的事情。真的，我觉得你们鹿家族吧，做什么事情都与众不同。哎，他能跑吗？”

“当然了，”鹿妈妈柔声回答喜鹊，“不过，请原谅我现在不能和你说话，我还有很多事要做，而且现在我的身子还有点虚弱。”

“不必为我费神，”喜鹊说，“我自己也很忙的，只不过这种事也不是每天都能看见。想想对我们喜鹊来说，生养孩子是多么费心费力啊！那些小家伙从蛋里孵出来后根本不能动，只能无助地躺在鸟窝里，等着我们去照料。我再说一次，我们要‘照料’他们，估计你们这

些鹿根本就不理解这意味着什么。你要给他们喂食，还要时时照看他们，多麻烦，多累心啊！你只需想一想，要天天给他们找吃的，还得时时看着他们，以防发生什么意外，就知道这有多累了。你一离开吧，他们就完全没办法生活，真的，我说的可是大实话。等到他们能够走动，长出羽毛，看起来像那么回事，还不知道要到什么时候。”

“对不起，”鹿妈妈说，“你刚刚说什么了？我没有注意听。”

喜鹊飞走了。“真是蠢货，”她心里想，“虽然长得英俊，但真是够蠢的。”

鹿妈妈并没有注意到喜鹊飞走了，她满怀热情，继续清理刚出生的宝贝，用舌头温柔地爱抚它的整个身体。

小东西有点站不住，晃晃悠悠的。在妈妈舌头温柔的舔舐下，他慢慢站定，安安静静地站在那里。点缀着几个白色斑点的小小的红色表皮，看起来依旧很凌乱，他那茫然的脸上满是浓浓的睡意。

在这块空地周围，长满了榛树丛、山茱萸、黑刺李和幼嫩的接骨木；空地上方，高大的枫树、山毛榉和橡树相互缠绕，形成一个天然的绿色“屋顶”；下方的百合花正怒放着，紧贴着地面的草莓叶子刚开始舒展，黑褐色的坚实土壤上遍布着蕨菜、野豌豆和鼠尾草。早上，阳光透过厚厚的叶子照下来，这里就活像被一张金色的网罩住一样。原本宁静的森林也喧闹起来，到处回荡着欢歌笑语。画眉鸟的欢叫声不绝于耳，鸽子在不停“咕咕”叫，燕八哥、小雀鸟婉转个不停，还有山雀在“叽叽喳喳”。在这片歌声交织的世界里，一只松鸦从空中飞过去，嘴里发出尖锐的叫声，像是在和谁吵架一样，一旁的喜鹊看见后就嘲笑松鸦的窘态，而野鸡也高声尖叫起来。偶尔，还会传来啄木鸟的欢乐尖叫。猎鹰掠过树顶发出尖厉的叫声，虽然声音不大，但足以穿透整个树林，还有一群乌鸦，一直扯着暗哑的嗓子在歌唱。

不过，初生的小鹿根本听不懂这其中的任何一首歌，任何一句呼

唤，或是对话中的任何一个词语。他甚至根本没有留心这些声音，也没有注意到飘荡在树林里的任何一种味道。他听见的只是鹿妈妈一直不停地用舌头清洗、温暖、亲吻他的沙沙声，他闻到的也只是鹿妈妈身体的味道。鹿妈妈身上的味道真好闻，小鹿向妈妈的身体挪近了一点，依偎着她，搜寻一阵，终于找到了那个给予他生命营养的地方。

在小鹿吮吸奶汁时，鹿妈妈仍然爱抚着这个小家伙。她低声呼唤：“斑比。”隔一会儿，鹿妈妈就会抬起头听听四周的声响，并且闻闻空气里的味道，然后又低下头亲吻小鹿，她既满足又开心。

“斑比，”她不停地低语，“我的小班比。”

第二章

初夏时节，湛蓝的天空下，树木安安静静地挺立着，向外伸展的枝丫沐浴在阳光里。大树下的灌木丛里，花儿竞相绽放，红的、白的、黄的，像星星一样散布在树丛；有的花儿已经开始结果了，枝干上挂满了数不清的荚果，细致紧实，像握紧的小拳头一样。灌木丛之外的森林里，更是色彩缤纷，花儿放佛五颜六色的星星。整个大地沉浸在柔和的微光里，闪耀着五彩的光芒，静谧而美好。树林间飘荡着新鲜树叶、多彩花朵、潮湿土壤和翠绿大树的芬芳。清晨破晓和日落西山时，整个森林里都会发出万千种声响。蜜蜂、黄蜂们更是一刻都不停息，从早至晚嗡嗡嗡，那声音就回荡在这香气萦绕的森林里。

斑比生命最初的日子就是这样的。此刻，斑比跟在妈妈身后，走在一条贯穿灌木丛的窄窄小径上。从这样的小径上走过是多么愉快啊！两旁浓密的树叶轻轻拂过肚子，然后弯到一边去；有好些地方被东西阻塞了，路不太通，但他们还是能轻而易举地通过。在整个森林里，像这样的小径纵横交错，几乎随处可见。有时候来到一丛灌木前，斑比找不着出口，觉得眼前是不可穿过的绿墙，只得停下来，但鹿妈妈总是知道小径在哪里，她根本不用四下去寻找，也不需要细想斟酌。

斑比总是问妈妈问题，他喜欢向妈妈提问，然后听鹿妈妈回答，不管答案是什么，他都会觉得开心。斑比不用费力去想，源源不断的问题就会从脑海里冒出来，对此，斑比也从来不觉得奇怪，他认为有问题是很自然的事情，并且对他来说，提出问题然后听妈妈解答，这是一件天大的乐事。等待答案的过程也是美妙的，如果答案和他想的一样，那他会感到尤为满足；当然也有时，他并不能理解答案，但是没有关系，他依然会觉得高兴，因为他会用自己的方式去思考妈妈给的答案；有的时候，他知道妈妈故意不告诉他完整的答案，最开始他

的喜悦感并不会因此减少半分，因为这时斑比的好奇心活跃起来了，神秘而快乐的猜想也在心头一闪而过，对未知世界的期待让他既兴奋又不安，同时他也会安静下来。

曾经有一次，斑比问妈妈：“妈妈，这条路是谁的呢？”

“我们的。”鹿妈妈回答他。

“你和我吗？”斑比又问。

“是的，宝贝。”

“我们两个？”

“对啊。”

“就只属于我们两个吗？”

“也不是，”鹿妈妈说，“是我们鹿……”

“什么是鹿呀？”斑比问，然后笑了起来。

鹿妈妈转身，从头到脚打量着斑比，也笑了起来。“你是鹿，我也是鹿，我们都是鹿啊，”她说，“宝贝，你懂了吗？”

斑比高兴地跃向空中。“嗯，我明白了，我是一只小鹿，你是一只大鹿，对不对呀？”

鹿妈妈点点头，说：“对，瞧你的高兴劲儿。”

不过，斑比又变得认真起来了：“那除了我和你，还有其他的鹿吗？”

“当然喽，”鹿妈妈说，“还有很多很多鹿。”

“他们都在哪呢？”斑比兴奋地追问。

“就在森林里啊，到处都是。”鹿妈妈说。

“可我从来没有见过他们啊？”

“你以后会看见的。”

“什么时候？”斑比停下脚步，内心满的好奇。

“就快了。”鹿妈妈继续平静地向前走。斑比安安静静跟上去，心里在想“就快了”是什么意思。他得出结论：“就快了”肯定不是指“现在”，但又不知道“就快了”是指多久，多久以后又会变成“很久”。突然，他又问：“这条路是谁修的呢？”

“是我们修的。”鹿妈妈说。

斑比可吃惊了：“我们？是你和我吗？”

鹿妈妈说：“不，我们……是我们鹿。”

斑比继续问：“是哪一些鹿呢？”

“我们所有鹿。”鹿妈妈很快回答。

他们继续往前走。斑比兴致很高，走着走着就想跳出小径，不过他还是紧紧跟在妈妈后面。这时，一阵窸窣窸窣的响声从前方的路面传来。在蕨菜和莴苣叶下，有个东西正在拼命逃窜。一声尖锐的哀号后，一切又安静下来，只有树叶和草叶还在晃动。原来刚才是一只雪貂在抓老鼠。那雪貂抓完了老鼠，正偷摸地往旁边走，准备去享用它的大餐。

“那是什么？”斑比惊恐地问。

“没什么。”鹿妈妈安慰他。

“但是，”斑比颤抖着，“我看见它了。”

“好，好，”鹿妈妈说，“不要害怕，刚刚那是一只雪貂咬死了一只老鼠。”但是斑比害怕极了，他被一股未知的、巨大的恐惧攫住了。过了好久，斑比才开口说话，他又问：“为什么雪貂要咬死老鼠呢？”

“因为——”鹿妈妈有点犹豫，“我们走快点吧。”她好像突然想到了什么，好像忘记了斑比的问题。她开始加快脚步，斑比就蹦蹦跳跳地跟在后面。

接下来很长一段时间，他们都没有说话，就这样安静地往前走。最后，斑比忐忑不安地问了一句：“妈妈，是不是我们有时也要杀死老鼠啊？”

“不会的。”鹿妈妈回答。

“从来不吗？”斑比又问。

“嗯，从来不。”鹿妈妈给出答案。

“为什么不呢？”听妈妈这么回答，斑比宽慰不少。

“因为我们鹿从来不杀生。”鹿妈妈简单地说。

斑比又开心了起来。

小径的近旁长着一棵幼小的白蜡树，斑比和鹿妈妈经过时，树上传来一阵大声的争吵。鹿妈妈根本不关心树上发生了什么，她径直往前走，斑比却好奇得停下脚步来。头顶两只松鸦正在为刚抢来的一个鸟窝争执。

“滚开，你这个蠢货！”一只松鸦大声叫道。

“哼！得了吧，你这个笨蛋，”另一只说，“我可一点不怕你。”

“别和我抢，找你自己的窝去，”第一只松鸦喝道，“否则我打爆你的头！”他完全被气疯了。“卑鄙的家伙！”他喋喋不休地念叨，“卑鄙的家伙！”

另一只松鸦注意到斑比在看他们，就从上面飞下来，停在低处的树枝上，对着斑比就是一阵叫嚷：“看什么看？你个小怪物！”

斑比害怕极了，赶忙一蹦一跳往前去了。他被刚刚发生的一幕吓坏了，便又乖乖地跟在鹿妈妈身后，心里想：怎么妈妈刚刚都没注意到我不在她身后呢？

过了一会儿，斑比问鹿妈妈：“妈妈，‘卑鄙’是什么意思啊？”

“我不知道。”鹿妈妈说。

斑比想了一会儿，又开始发问了：“妈妈，他们怎么都这么生气呢？”

“因为他们在争夺食物。”鹿妈妈回答。

“妈妈，我们是不是有时也要争夺食物呢？”斑比问。

“不，我们不会。”鹿妈妈说。

“为什么不？”斑比问。

“因为我们有足够的食物。”鹿妈妈回答。

斑比还想知道点什么。“妈妈……”于是他又开始问。

“怎么了？”

“我们有时也会这样生气吗？”斑比问。

“不，孩子，”鹿妈妈说，“我们可不会这样。”

他们又继续往前走。突然，眼前渐渐变得明亮起来，然后越来越亮。原来他们走到了小径的尽头，那里生长着一团藤蔓和灌木丛，再向前跨几步就是一片敞亮空旷的地方了。斑比想跳到前面去，但被鹿妈妈拦住了。

“那是什么啊？”斑比按捺不住内心的欣喜，急急地问。

“那是草地。”鹿妈妈回答他。

“草地是什么？”斑比紧接着问。

没等斑比说完，鹿妈妈便回答他：“你一会儿就知道了。”她已经变得严肃起来，并且十分警惕。她一动不动地站着，头高高抬起，专心聆听一切声音，然后深吸了几口气，看起来十分认真。

“好了。”最后，鹿妈妈对斑比说：“我们可以出去了。”

斑比正要向前一跃，又被妈妈拦下来。

她说：“等我叫你的时候再出来。”斑比听妈妈这么说，立刻安静地站在那里。“没事儿，宝贝，”鹿妈妈为了鼓励斑比，对他说，“接下来好好听我给你讲。”斑比看妈妈语气这么严肃，心里可兴奋了。

“在草地上行走不是一件简单的事，”鹿妈妈继续说，“这是一件很困难，而且很危险的事情。你以后会明白的。现在，你要按我说的做，听见了吗？”

“嗯。”斑比向妈妈保证。

“很好，”鹿妈妈说，“我先出去，你在这里等，但是要一直看着我，视线一秒都不要移开。如果你看见我往回走，你就转身跑，跑得越快越好，我会追上你的。”她沉默了片刻，像是在想什么，然后继

续认真地说：“你的腿能跑多快，你就要跑多快，不管发生什么都要往前跑……即使看见我倒在地上……也不要去想我发生了什么，明白吗？不管你听到什么，看到什么，都要尽可能一直往前跑。我说的这些，你能答应我做到吗？”

“嗯，我答应你。”斑比轻声说。鹿妈妈说话的语气实在是太严肃了！

鹿妈妈继续说：“一会儿在草地上，如果我叫你，你也要马上到我的身后来，不要到处看，也不要问问题。记住没有？一刻也不要迟疑，不要多想，一定要跑。如果我开始跑，那么你也要跑，不要停下来，直到我们回到现在这个地方。宝贝，记住了吗？”

“记住了。”斑比的声音透露出几丝担忧。

“那……现在我要出去了。”鹿妈妈说，她似乎比先前平静了不少。

鹿妈妈走出灌木丛。斑比一直死死盯着她，他看见妈妈慢慢地、小心翼翼地一步一步往前走。斑比站在那里，内心充满了期待，同时还感觉到害怕和好奇。他看见妈妈细心聆听各个方向的声音，看到她缩起身子，他也不自主惊了一下，准备随时掉头向灌木丛跑去。这时，鹿妈妈平静下来，她伸直身子，满意地环视一圈，然后开始呼唤斑比：“过来吧！”

斑比听见妈妈的呼喊后，一下子就跳了出去。他快乐极了，内心充满了无尽的喜悦，立马就忘记了自己的担忧。

之前在灌木丛里，斑比抬头时只能看见绿色的树顶，只有偶尔才能瞥见蓝蓝的天空。可是现在，一片广阔的蓝天就铺陈在他眼前，他也不知道自己为什么会这么快乐。在森林里，他只能偶尔看见一缕阳光，或是太阳光透过树林缝隙洒下来的点点光线。突然之间，他就站

在令人目眩的温暖天空下，太阳光洒在他身上，像是有无尽的能量，绚丽而炽热的光线使他闭上了眼，但是这股温暖却打开了他的心儿。

斑比欣喜万分，就像着迷了一样，心情无比激动。他太疯狂了，不停地跳向空中，三次、四次、五次，他不停地跳啊跳。他感觉心中有股强烈的渴望，就是要不停地跳跃。他欢快地伸展着自己的小腿儿，深深地呼吸着草地上的空气，不禁陶醉其中。闻着草地散发的甜美气息，他感到无比幸福，只能不断跳向空中来表达自己内心的喜悦。

斑比只是一只小鹿，如果他是人类的孩子，那么他一定会欢乐地叫起来，但是他只是一只年幼的鹿，小鹿是不会叫的，至少不会像人类的孩子那样。所以，这只小鹿只能用自己的方式——四腿并用，整个身子腾向空中来释放喜悦。鹿妈妈在一旁高兴地看着斑比，她看着自己的宝贝孩子跃向空中，又笨拙地掉到原处，她看见他对周围一切感到无比惊奇，然后一次又一次腾向空中。斑比过去只知道灌木丛中那条窄窄的小径，而且他之前的生活都被限制在狭小的空间里，这一切鹿妈妈都知道。斑比只会不断在原地跳，并没有四处跑，因为他还没学会如何自由地在开阔的草地上奔跑。

想到这里，鹿妈妈绷直前腿，身子倾向斑比，对着斑比笑了一下，然后突然向外跑去，在草地上绕了一个圈，留下脚下的高秆草沙沙作响。

斑比吃惊地看着妈妈，不知所措地站在那里。他心想：“难道这是让我跑回灌木丛的信号吗？”他还记得之前妈妈告诉他：“无论看见什么，听见什么，都不要担心我，只需尽可能地往前跑。”斑比正要转身往回跑，却看见妈妈突然飞快向他跑来。鹿妈妈“嗖嗖”从斑比面前跑过，停在两步开外的地方，像之前一样对着斑比笑。“孩子，快来追我！”说完鹿妈妈就立即跑开了。

斑比愣住了，心里想：“妈妈这是什么意思呢？”这时，鹿妈妈又“嗖嗖”地跑到他跟前，速度快得让斑比有些眩晕。她用鼻子碰了碰斑比的腰，快速地说了句：“来追我哦！”然后又飞地跑了出去。

斑比开始去追妈妈。他刚开始走了几步，就变成了飞跃的步伐，那感觉像是不用费力就能飞起来。脚踏着一块地，腾飞的脚下还有一块地，广阔的草地上还有更多空地。斑比高兴得忘乎所以了。

在他听来，踏在草地上发出的沙沙声是那么美妙，拂过身体的青草像是丝绸一样柔软光滑。他绕着圈儿奔跑，接着转了个弯，又开始绕另一个圈跑，反反复复，一直不停地玩。

鹿妈妈安静地站在一旁喘息，但眼睛一直盯着斑比。斑比太狂野了！

不一会儿，斑比停下奔跑的脚步，走到鹿妈妈面前，优雅地提起鹿蹄，高兴地看着妈妈，然后和她一起心满意足地并肩漫步在草地上。

现在，斑比来过大草地了，也全身心感受了蓝天、太阳和草地。他抬头望了一眼足以让他头晕目眩的太阳，感受到了阳光照在背上的温暖。

此刻，斑比开始用眼睛欣赏这片美丽的草地了。每走一步，斑比就会惊讶于自己看到的景象。这不像在森林里走路时能随处看见泥土，在这青草覆盖的草地上，连一丁点裸露的土壤都看不见。每次踏上去，像碧波一样茂密的青草便会温顺地倒向一边；挪开脚，草儿又若无其事地直立起来。那广袤的绿野上，白色的雏菊星星点点，红花草、紫苜蓿和金黄色的蒲公英簇簇拥拥，一幕好不美丽的景象啊！

“妈妈，快看！快看！”斑比大声喊，“有一朵花在飞。”

“那不是花，”鹿妈妈说，“那是一只蝴蝶。”

斑比出神地凝视着那只蝴蝶，她在一株草上飞起，然后在空中翩翩起舞。这时，斑比才注意到草地上方飞舞着许许多多蝴蝶，她们似乎很忙碌，但事实上都是在慢悠悠地飞，忽高忽低，就像在玩一个游戏。斑比兴奋地看着蝴蝶。她们看起来真像快乐飞舞的花儿，只是不愿乖乖待在枝头，离开花枝只为在空中跳一会儿舞；她们也像是在寻觅落脚处的花儿，因为没有固定的枝头，不得不在日落时分寻找歇脚的地方，她们落下来，停在某处，好像决定今晚就住那里了，可是一会儿又飞了起来，越飞越高，越飞越远，似乎所有的好地方都被同伴占领了一样。

斑比目不转睛地注视着她们，他想靠近一点，好仔细地观察她们。可她们飞来飞去，穿梭不息，空气也随着飘荡起来，斑比找不到任何观察的机会。

当他低头看地面时，脚下又突然惊出无数小生命，他觉得太神奇了。这些小生命向各个方向逃散开去，前一秒还是密密麻麻的挤作一群，下一秒就全都钻回草地，没了踪影。

“妈妈，那些都是什么啊？”斑比问。

“那是蚂蚁。”鹿妈妈回答。

“你看，”斑比大叫了起来，“那边有棵草在跳，你看它跳得多高啊！”

“那不是草，”鹿妈妈解释，“那是一只蚱蜢。”

“他为什么要那么跳呢？”斑比问。

“因为我们在这里走啊，”鹿妈妈回答，“他害怕我们踩着他。”

“哦，”斑比转向坐在一朵雏菊上的蚱蜢，友好地说道，“喂，你不要害怕，我们不会伤害你的。”

“我才不怕呢，”不过蚱蜢声音还是颤抖着，“因为我刚在和我妻子讲话，所以才被你们吓着了。”

“打扰你们了，对不起。”斑比羞怯地向蚱蜢道歉。

“没事儿，”蚱蜢声音颤颤的，“是你们就没关系，但我不知道会是谁来了，所以必须得小心点。”

“这是我第一次到草地上来，”斑比大声说，“是我妈妈带着我……”

蚱蜢站在那里，脑袋低下来，像是要用头准备撞谁一样。他一脸严肃，嘟囔着：“你说什么啊，我一点都不感兴趣，我没时间和你在这儿闲扯了，我得去找我的妻子。起跳——”说完蚱蜢就跳走了。

“起跳？”斑比也跟着自语。蚱蜢跳得那么高，一下子就消失了，斑比不由吃了一惊。

斑比跑到妈妈那里去。“妈妈，我和他说话了。”

“和谁啊？”鹿妈妈问他。

“蚱蜢，”斑比说，“我和他说话，他特别友好，我很喜欢他。他好厉害啊，全身都是绿的，还有几片透明的东西，和叶子一样，不过叶子不是透明的。”

“那是他的翅膀。”鹿妈妈回答。

“哦，”斑比继续说，“他神色有点严肃，看起来也很聪明。不过他对我很友好，而且他还能跳那么高！他说了一句‘起跳’，然后跳得可高了，后来我都看不见他了。”

他们继续往前走。与蚱蜢的对话让斑比兴奋异常，同时因为这是他第一次和陌生人说话，所以他感觉到有点累。他感觉有点饿了，于

是就靠近妈妈去吮奶汁。

过了一会儿，斑比重新站起来，带着一股满足的喜悦凝望着大地。每次吃完奶，斑比都会有这样满足的甜蜜感。他注意到草丛里有一朵淡色的花儿在动，便靠近仔细看。咦！原来不是花，是一只蝴蝶。斑比悄悄地挨近那只蝴蝶。

那只蝴蝶身子重重地压在草茎上，正缓缓地扇动翅膀。

“您别动，好吗？”斑比说。

“为什么要让我不动？我可是一只蝴蝶啊！”蝴蝶十分吃惊地回答他。

“哦，那您能待着不动吗，就一小会儿？”斑比恳求道，“我想仔细地看看您，求求您了。”

“那好吧，”蝴蝶说，“为了你，我就待着不动，可是只有一会儿哦。”

斑比站在蝴蝶面前。“您太美了！”他赞叹道，“多美啊！就像一朵花儿一样。”

“什么？”蝴蝶拍拍翅膀，大声地说，“你是说我像花吗？我们可都认为蝴蝶比花儿漂亮多了。”

斑比有点尴尬。“哦，是的，”他结结巴巴说，“您当然漂亮多了，对不起，我的意思是……”

“不管你是什么意思，在我看来都一样。”蝴蝶一边回答，一边装模作样地地弓起身子，玩起自己纤弱的触角。

斑比看得入迷了。“您太优美了！又优雅，又美丽！您的翅膀多么洁白，多么光鲜夺目啊！”

蝴蝶张开翅膀，然后将它们高高竖起，并拢在一起，看起来就像是一面扬起的白帆。

“啊！”斑比喊道，“我知道了，您确实比花儿更美丽。而且你还能飞，但花儿只能待在枝头。”

蝴蝶张开翅膀，说：“当然，我是能飞的。”说完，蝴蝶就飞走了，她飞得如此轻盈，斑比几乎都看不见她，也不能循着她飞走的方向观察。蝴蝶鼓动双翼，优雅、轻盈地飞舞，不一会儿就飞入满是阳光的天空中。

“我是为了你才待着不动的，”蝴蝶飞到斑比面前，说，“不过现在，我要走了。”

这就是斑比眼中的草地。

第三章

在森林的中心，就在那条窄窄的小径几步开外的地方，有一块空地是属于鹿妈妈的。森林里的小径是鹿穿过森林的独有通道，但如果你不知道入口在哪里，在茂密的灌木丛中就很难找到它。

这块空地很小，小到只能刚好容下小鹿斑比和他的妈妈。这里也不高，每次鹿妈妈站起来，她的整个脑袋都会淹没在上方的树枝里。空地上方，榛树、荆豆树和山茱萸的树枝交织在一起，从树顶上洒下来的些许阳光，尽数被遮挡，所以地面从未被阳光亲吻过。斑比就是在这块空地上降生的，这里就是他和妈妈的家。

鹿妈妈躺在空地上睡着了，斑比也昏昏欲睡。但斑比突然一下清醒过来，他站起来，看着四周。

浓密的树荫下，斑比的家显得有些昏暗。树林里有轻柔的沙沙声，不时还会传来山雀们短促而嘹亮的鸣声，啄木鸟敲打树干发出“笃笃笃”的清脆声响，还有乌鸦嘶哑的叫喊声。除此之外，远近没有多余的声响，只是无边的寂静。不过，正值炎夏正午，细细听去，还有阳光难过的喘息声，空气闷热得不行。

斑比低头看看妈妈，开口问：“妈妈，你睡着了吗？”

鹿妈妈并没有睡着，斑比站起来的时候，她就已经醒了。

“我们现在要做什么呢？”斑比问。

“什么也不做，”鹿妈妈回答，“我们待在这里就行。乖宝贝，躺下来睡觉吧。”

可是，斑比此时此刻毫无睡意。“妈妈，”他哀求道，“我们去草地

吧。”

鹿妈妈抬起头。“去草地？现在去草地？”鹿妈妈的语气里充满了惊讶之情，斑比听后不由心里一颤。

“现在不能去草地吗？”他胆怯地问。

“不能，”鹿妈妈十分坚决地回答，“你不能现在去。”

“为什么呢？”斑比隐约感觉到有点神秘，他感到越来越害怕，但同时又急于想知道这到底是怎么回事，于是他问道：“为什么不能去草地？”

“等你长大一点，你就知道了。”鹿妈妈这么回答他。

“但是，”斑比并未罢休，“我现在就想知道。”

“还是等以后吧。”鹿妈妈回答他，“你现在不过是个小孩子，”她继续温柔地说，“有些事是不能和小孩子说的。”她严肃起来，“这时候去草地，亏你想得出。我可从来不会这样想，这可是大白天啊！”

“可是，我们上次去的时候不也是白天吗？”斑比反驳道。

“那不一样，”鹿妈妈解释说，“那是在早上。”

“是不是我们只能在早上才能去草地上？”斑比很好奇地问。

鹿妈妈向斑比耐心地解释：“我们只在清晨、傍晚，或者深夜去草地。”

“白天不能去吗？我们从来不在白天去吗？”

鹿妈妈迟疑了一下，最后说：“这个嘛，有的时候，有一些鹿会在白天去……不过那是在特殊情况下……我现在还不能跟你解释太

多，因为你太小了……有一些鹿确实会白天去……但是那太危险了。”

“有什么危险呢？”斑比聚精会神地问。

鹿妈妈并不愿意再多说下去：“我们处于危险之中，我的宝贝，你记住这点就好了，你还不能理解这些事情。”

其实斑比觉得自己什么都能理解，就是不明白为什么妈妈不告诉她真相，不过听妈妈这么说，他也就没有继续问下去。

“这就是我们的生活。”鹿妈妈继续说，“虽然我们都喜欢白天，尤其是当我们还小的时候，但是在白天，我们必须这么安静地躺着，只能在傍晚到第二天清晨这段时间内四处漫游，你明白了吗？”

“嗯。”斑比回答。

“所以，我的孩子，我们现在就待在这里吧。我们在这里很安全，现在躺下来，继续睡吧。”

但是斑比并不愿躺下来，反而继续问：“为什么这里安全呢？”

“因为周围的灌木丛在保护着我们，”鹿妈妈回答，“要是有人经过，碰到灌木丛的枝叶或是干枯的枝干，就会有声音，陈年的落叶被踩时也会发出窸窣窸窣的声音，这些都会提醒我们。还有啊，松鸦和喜鹊会给我们放哨，如果有什么情况，我们在很远就能知道。”

“陈年落叶是什么？”斑比问。

“过来，坐在我边上，”鹿妈妈说，“让我告诉你。”斑比心满意足地坐下来，紧紧依偎着妈妈。鹿妈妈告诉斑比：树叶不会一直都是绿的。阳光、温暖都会消失，天气会变冷，会下霜，叶子会变色，变成黄色的、褐色的、红色的，然后从枝头飘落，那时候，许多树木就只

剩下光秃秃的枝干了，伸向天空，一片萧索。不过，对我们来说，地上的干枯叶子可有很大的意义，要是有谁走过，它们就会发出沙沙的声音，我们听见这个声音，就知道肯定有人往这边走。陈年落叶对我们的意义太大了！它们完全尽到了职责，发挥了莫大的警戒作用！即使在盛夏，丛林里也有很多陈年落叶，一有危险，它们就会给我们警报。

斑比将身子紧紧贴着鹿妈妈，这么坐着听妈妈讲话，真是舒服极了！

鹿妈妈讲完后，斑比陷入了思考。他心想：“尽管陈年落叶没有生命，被冻在地面，遭受了不少痛苦，可是它们一直为我们放哨，有它们真是好。”他还在想妈妈口中常说的危险到底是什么，不过由于思考太多，他一会儿就累了。周围仍是一片寂静，只能听见空气被热得大声喘气的声音，不一会儿，斑比就进入了梦乡。

第四章

这天晚上，斑比和妈妈又一次在草地上漫步。斑比还以为草地上所能耳闻眼见的东西，自己都知道得差不多了，但似乎一切并不是像他想的那样。

和第一次一样，斑比和妈妈在草地上玩着追赶对方的游戏。广阔的草地，高远的天空，清新的空气，斑比沉醉其中，疯玩起来，一圈接着一圈地奔跑。过了一会儿，斑比突然发现妈妈安静地站在一旁，好像在和谁讲话，隔那么远，也看不清那边是谁。当时斑比正往空中跳，看见妈妈在那边说话，就猛地停下来，着地时由于四腿叉得较远，闪了个趔趄，他又往空中一跳，最后才找到平衡，稳稳落在地上。斑比朝着妈妈站的地方，踉踉跄跄走过去，心里好奇极了。

他发现在妈妈面前高高的草地上，竖立着两只长长的耳朵，灰褐色的，上面还有黑色的条纹。斑比止步不前，但鹿妈妈在前面叫：“过来，这是我们的朋友——兔先生。快过来，宝贝，乖乖地让他看看你。”

斑比走过去。一只野兔坐在草地上，看起来老实极了，有时候那像勺子一样的耳朵会突然立起来，有时候又会放下去，像是突然病了一样。当看见兔子嘴边直挺挺、硬邦邦的胡须时，斑比有点不敢相信妈妈说的话。不过，他注意到眼前这个小个子面容和善，性情很温和，还不时胆怯地瞪着大眼睛东瞅瞅、西瞧瞧。斑比心想这位兔先生确实很友好，心里的疑虑迅速烟消云散，不过没想到连最开始对兔子的尊敬也忘得一干二净了。

“晚上好，小伙子。”野兔向斑比打招呼，毕恭毕敬的。

斑比只是点头问好，他也不知道为什么，竟然只是点了一下头。

他一直都很友好，很礼貌，甚至有一点谦逊，反正就是这样的性格，也许是天生注定的吧。

“哇，多么帅气的一位王子。”野兔对鹿妈妈说。他认真地观察斑比，先竖起一只勺子似的耳朵，接着又竖起另外一只勺子似的耳朵，然后两只耳朵又突然倒下去，软绵绵的样子，可是斑比并不觉得这有趣。兔子的耳朵动来动去，好像在说：“他根本不值得我在意。”

野兔还在观察斑比，他的鼻子、嘴唇，还有嘴边漂亮的胡须不停动来动去，像一个努力控制自己不打喷嚏的人一样。看到这一幕，斑比才不由地笑了。

野兔也很快笑了，眼神透露出关切之情：“恭喜您。”他对鹿妈妈说，“我真诚地恭喜您和您的孩子。放心，他一定会长成一位出色的王子，这一点谁都看得出来。”

说完这话，野兔突然抬起两条前腿，直直站起身来，这叫斑比吃惊不已。接着野兔又竖起耳朵，鼻子仍然不停抽动，四周侦察一番，转眼又变成了四腿着地。“抱歉，”他最后说，“我今晚还有很多事要做，就不打扰二位了，请允许我……”他转个身就跳走了，两只耳朵就这么向后耷拉在双肩上。

“晚安。”斑比在后面喊。

鹿妈妈微笑着说：“兔先生是个好人，温文尔雅，在平时也很谨慎，可他在这世上活得不容易。”妈妈的话里充满了同情。

斑比自己走了一会儿，鹿妈妈在一旁吃草。他想再次遇见之前的朋友，也想结交新的朋友。因为不知道心里到底想要什么，斑比感觉到心中有一种期望。突然，他听见远处传来轻微的沙沙声，感觉有明快而温柔的脚步踏在草地上。他盯着前方，看见草地那边有一个东西正向这边移动。那是有生命的东西吗？不，有两个东西向这边走来。

斑比迅速看了鹿妈妈一眼，发现她把头深深地埋在青草里，根本没在意这一切。可那边草地上，那两个东西正绕着圈跑，就像斑比之前在草地上跑一样。斑比有点害怕，他往回跳，似乎想要逃走。这时候，鹿妈妈注意到斑比的举动，抬起了头。

“怎么了？”她大声问。

但斑比说不出话来，他根本不知道说什么好，只能结结巴巴地说：“看……那……边……”

鹿妈妈往那边看。“我知道了。”她说，“那是我的姐姐，看来她现在也生了个孩子。不，她生了两个孩子。”最开始，鹿妈妈语调欢快，但是后来又严肃起来：“埃娜有两个孩子，两个啊。”

斑比凝视着前方草地，这时他看见有一个长得和他妈妈一模一样的生物朝这边走来，自己之前并没有注意到那个生物。草地上两个东西绕着圈儿奔跑，但也只能看见他们红色的后背，那两个东西奔跑起来就像两条细小的红色条纹。

“走，”鹿妈妈说，“我们过去，他们会成为你的小伙伴的。”

斑比本来想要跑过去，但是看见妈妈脚步缓慢，每走一步还左右看看，只得慢慢跟在后面，不过他的内心洋溢着兴奋之情，心情可急切了。

“我想我们迟早会碰见埃娜阿姨的，”鹿妈妈继续说，“她这一直是住在哪里呢？我知道她会有孩子，这不难猜到。不过，她有两个孩子啊……”

最后，他们也看见了斑比和鹿妈妈，纷纷朝这边走了过来。斑比满满的心思都在那两个小孩身上，但他不得不先向阿姨问好。

埃娜阿姨十分友好。“来，”她对斑比说，“这是戈博，这是费琳。

现在你们可以一起去玩，一起去跑去跳了。”

三个孩子安安静静站着，互相盯着看。斑比站在戈博面前，戈博紧靠费琳站着，谁也没有动一下，他们就这样站着，目瞪口呆地盯着彼此。

“快去奔跑吧！”鹿妈妈说，“你们很快就会成为朋友的。”

“这小孩真可爱，”埃娜阿姨说，“他长得真不错，这么强壮，还站得这么挺直。”

“嗯，还不错，”鹿妈妈谦虚地说，“我们都得知足。可是埃娜，你有两个小孩……”

“是，我明白，”埃娜阿姨说，“亲爱的，你知道，我以前有过孩子。”

“斑比是我的第一个。”鹿妈妈说。

“慢慢来，”埃娜阿姨安慰她道，“可能下一次就会不一样了。”

孩子们依旧站着，谁也不说话。费琳突然向前一跳，然后跑了出去，她可受不了像这样子呆呆站在那里。

斑比看见费琳跑了，就立刻向她追去，戈博也在后面跟着。他们向前绕了半个圈，一个急转身，三个家伙全都摔在地上。然后，他们就到处跑，互相追逐。这实在太开心了！停下来时，大家都上气不接下气，累得不成样子。现在，他们已经成为了好朋友，开始各自讲述各自的经历。

斑比给他们讲自己如何与友善的蚱蜢交谈，还和蝴蝶说了些什么。

“那你有没有和金龟子说过话呢？”费琳问他。

不，斑比从来没有和金龟子说过话，他连金龟子是什么都还不知道呢。

“我和他说过话。”费琳有一点得意地说。

“松鸦骂过我。”斑比说。

“真的啊？”戈博语气很吃惊，“松鸦真的骂过你吗？”

戈博特别胆小，所以对什么都容易感到惊奇。“好吧，其实，”他说，“刺猬还扎过我鼻子。”不过说起这事，戈博也只是一句话就带过了。

“刺猬又是什么？”斑比急切地问。在斑比看来，和朋友待在一起，听他们讲这么多精彩的事情，真是太美妙了。

“刺猬是个讨厌的东西，”费琳大声说，“身上全是长长的刺，他可坏了。”

“你真的觉得刺猬很坏吗？”戈博问她，“可是他从来不伤害别人啊。”

“是吗？”费琳听了，立马反问他，“难道他没有刺过你吗？”

“哦，那是因为我想和他说话，”戈博回答，“而且只刺了我一下，一点也不疼。”

斑比问戈博：“为什么他不想和你说话呢？”

“刺猬不和任何人说话，”费琳打断他俩，“只要有谁靠近，他就会蜷成一团，浑身竖起棘刺。我妈妈说，刺猬不愿意和其他动物打交道。”

“可能他只是害怕。”戈博说。

不过，费琳可不是这么想的，她说：“妈妈说的，不要和这种家伙来往。”

过了一会儿，斑比轻声问戈博：“你知道什么是‘危险’吗？”

斑比说完，和戈博认真思考起来。费琳也加入他俩，三颗小脑袋凑在一块儿。戈博看见斑比满脸好奇地等待他的答案，费劲地想了一会儿。“危险，”戈博小声地说，“是特别不好的东西。”

“对，”斑比兴奋地回应，“我知道那是很不好的东西，可是究竟是什么呢？”三个小家伙都害怕地颤抖起来。

突然，费琳高兴地大叫起来：“我知道‘危险’是什么了，就是你想逃离的东西。”她感到害怕，不想再继续待在那里，于是说完就跑开了。斑比和戈博也跟了过去，三个孩子又开始一起玩耍，在碧绿的草地上打滚儿，不一会儿就忘记了那个恼人的问题。又过了一会儿，他们停止嬉戏，站在草地上像之前那样聊天。他们朝妈妈们那个方向望去，看见她俩仍亲密地站在那边，一边悠闲地吃草，一边安静地交谈。

这时，埃娜阿姨抬起头呼喊她的孩子：“戈博，费琳，快过来，我们要走了。”

鹿妈妈也朝斑比喊道：“斑比，快回来，我们也该走了。”

“再等一会儿嘛，”费琳热切地央求，“就一会儿。”

“这里这么好玩，我们再待一会儿吧，好不好？”斑比恳求道。“这里这么好玩，再让我们玩一会儿吧。”戈博也畏惧地重复斑比的话。三个孩子异口同声地央求着。

埃娜看着斑比的妈妈说：“瞧，我刚怎么跟你说来着？他们现在就不想分开了。”

对斑比来说，这一天的经历实在是太刺激了，但是更刺激的还在后面。这时，森林里传来一阵脚步声和树枝被折断时发出的噼啪响，也有窸窸窣窣的声音，斑比还没来得及竖起耳朵听，就看见两个身影从灌木丛里冒出来，一个“轰隆隆”地跑在前面，一个在后面追，他们就像一阵风一样，在草地上兜了一个大圈，又迅速消失在灌木丛后，只留下疾驰而去的脚步声。过了一会儿，那两个身影又突然从灌木丛中跑出来，在距离斑比他们二十步远的地方停下来，安静地站在那里。

斑比一动不动地看着他们。他们同鹿妈妈和埃娜阿姨长得很像，唯一不同的是他们头上有一对角，上面布满了褐色珍珠状的东西，角尖银白透亮。斑比完全被迷住了，看看这个，又瞧瞧那个，其中一个身材略小，头上的鹿角也不大；而另一个英俊无比，头高高扬起，鹿角颜色由深向浅渐变，上面点缀着许多珍珠般大小的褐色斑点和黑色斑点，透亮的角尖闪闪发亮。

“哇！”费琳大声赞叹。“哇！”戈博也轻轻地喊了一句。但斑比什么也没有说，他只是呆呆看着，完全入神了。后来，那两只鹿转过身，各自朝着相反的方向，慢慢走向树林。其中那只英俊的鹿朝斑比他们这边走来，他昂首阔步地往前走，高贵的头颅向上扬起，根本没有瞥斑比他们一眼。

几个孩子大气也不敢出，直到他消失在灌木丛里。他们随即转身看向另外一只，但他早就已经走进了绿色树丛里。

费琳首先打破沉默，大声问：“他们是谁啊？”她那原本骄傲的声音现在有些颤抖。

“他们是谁？”戈博重复问，声音小到几乎听不见。但斑比沉默不语。

埃娜阿姨郑重地对他们说：“那是你们的父亲。”

之后大家也没再说什么，就这样分开了。埃娜阿姨带着她的两个孩子走进了最近的灌木丛，那是属于他们的小径，而斑比和妈妈则要横穿整个草地，一直走到那棵橡树，才能到达他们的小径。斑比沉默了好长一段时间，最后开口问：“难道他们没有看见我们吗？”

鹿妈妈当然明白斑比在想什么，她回答斑比：“他们当然看见我们了。”

斑比仍感到困惑，有点羞于继续问，但是自己又想不明白。“那为什么……”他就说了一半，没有继续往下说。

鹿妈妈鼓励斑比问下去：“孩子，你想知道什么？”

“为什么他们不和我们住在一起？”

“他们从来都不和我们住在一起，”鹿妈妈回答，“除了极少数时候以外。”

斑比继续问：“那他们为什么都不和我们说话呢？”

鹿妈妈说：“他们只是现在不和我们说话，这也是少数情况。我们要等，等他们向我们走来，等他们开口和我们说话。他们想和我们说话时，就会和我们说话了。”

斑比满心苦恼，又问：“我的父亲会和我说话吗？”

“当然会。”鹿妈妈向他保证，“等你长大了，他就会和你说话，而且有的时候，你还要和他待在一起。”

斑比不吭声了，就这么安安静静地走在鹿妈妈旁边，脑子里全是他父亲的容貌。“他太帅了！”斑比一遍一遍地想，“真是太英俊了！”

鹿妈妈当然看透了小班比的心思，对他说：“如果你足够聪明，没有遭遇危险，平安长大，你也会像你父亲那样，变得强壮、威武，

而且你也会有他那样的鹿角。”

斑比深深吸了一口气，心里充满了期待和快乐。

第五章

日子一天天过去，斑比有过很多次探险，经历也越来越丰富，但对斑比来说，每一天都是刺激的，因为他总能接触新鲜的事情。有的时候，斑比真觉得有点应接不暇，因为等着他去学习的东西实在太多、太多了！

斑比已经学会了分辨声音，这可不是指能听见附近的声响，那算不上什么本事，这里是指他能分辨出任何动静，甚至能听见微风送来的最细微响动，比如他能听出野鸡在隔壁丛林蹿动时轻微且断续的脚步声，田鼠沿着固定小道来回的奔跑声，鼯鼠高兴时绕着接骨木互相追逐的沙沙声，当白头鹰或者猎鹰飞来，斑比还能听见害怕地盘被抢走的隼发出的尖叫和怒号。鸽子扇动翅膀的声音、远处鸭子的嘎嘎叫，以及其他好多声响，斑比都已经非常熟悉了。

现在，斑比也知道如何嗅闻空气了，用不了多久，他就能和鹿妈妈做得一样好了。到那个时候，无论闻到什么味道，他都能立马分辨出来。当风儿从草地吹过来，他心里会想：“这是苜蓿和青草的香气。兔先生也在草地上，因为我能闻见他的味道。”

斑比只要闻闻树叶、泥土、野葱和香草的味道，就可以判断出雪貂是否经过这里；他要是俯身嗅嗅泥土的味道，还能知道狐狸是否走过；有时他还能通过嗅闻知道有其他鹿在附近，可能是埃娜阿姨和她的孩子，也可能是其他的鹿。

斑比再也不会想在大白天跑出去了，他学会了和黑夜做朋友。在白天，他愿意和妈妈躺在树荫笼罩的空地上，听着热辣空气的嘶嘶声，然后安然睡过去。

偶尔，斑比也会醒来听听动静，嗅嗅空气，看看是不是一切正

常。看来很安全！只有小山雀在小声地聊天，从不会安静片刻的蠓虫依旧嗡嗡嗡，然后就是树林里的鸽子在发出声响表达它们内心的柔情。他当然用不着关心这些声音，我们的斑比再次睡着了。

现在，斑比很享受黑夜。因为在夜晚，他可以随意走动，一切都变得鲜活起来，一切都变得生动起来。当然，他也得小心，不过完全不用像白天那样警惕。无论走到哪里，他都能碰见认识的朋友，他们也和斑比一样，都没有白天那般小心谨慎。

夜色中的森林安静且庄严。安静的夜空里，只有偶尔传来的些许声响，听起来和白天完全不一样，显得特别清亮，让人印象更加深刻。

斑比很喜欢猫头鹰，因为她飞行本领一流，而且她的动作也是悄无声息的。蝴蝶也能像她一样安静地飞行，不过她比蝴蝶可大多了！她性格也好，考虑周到，行事果断。她还有一双美丽的眼睛！斑比着实崇拜她那坚定而又勇敢的眼神。当猫头鹰和鹿妈妈或者其他动物交谈时，斑比总会站在一旁听，不过会往边上靠一点，因为他还是有点害怕她那锐利的眼神。猫头鹰会提到一些很聪明的东西，其中大多数斑比都不能理解，不过他还是相信他们很聪明，也是这些让斑比感到高兴，并且激起了他对猫头鹰的崇敬之情。

有时候，猫头鹰会大声喊：“咯——咕——咕！”这声音和画眉和黄莺的歌声完全不同，和布谷鸟友好的叫声也不一样，但斑比就是特别喜欢猫头鹰的叫声，因为他能从中听到神秘的真挚情感，听到不可言说的智慧，还能听到有一股奇怪的感伤。

鸣角鸮也是个可爱的小伙伴，他机灵活泼，对什么都感到好奇，一心想吸引别人的注意，总是使劲叫：“噢哟！呀！噢哟！呀！”他的声音尖锐无比，听上去就像他要死了一样。鸣角鸮似乎总是以吓人为乐，一旦有动物被他的叫声吓到，他就会开心得要命。“噢哟！

呀！”他扯开嗓子大叫，森林里方圆一英里都能听见他的声音。不过鸣角鸮在发出怪叫后，总会轻声地“咯咯”笑几声，这只有在离他很近的地方才能听到。

只要鸣角鸮发现其他动物被自己吓着了，或者其他动物认为他遇上了可怕的大事，他就会十分开心。斑比发现了他的这个特点，只要碰见鸣角鸮，就会红涨着脸问声：“你怎么了？”或者叹口气说：“唉！你刚刚把我吓死了！”这样一来，鸣角鸮就会很高兴。

“哈，是吧，”鸣角鸮总会笑着说，“听起来确实恐怖。”接着他就会把浑身羽毛弄得蓬松起来，变成一个灰白色的圆球，看起来特别酷。

斑比还遇见过一两次暴风雨，一次在白天，一次在黑夜。白天那次，眼见着所处的空地变得越来越暗，斑比不由得害怕起来。在他看来，这就像是黑暗笼罩了正午的天空。当暴风雨倾注而下，树木大声呜咽时，他吓得浑身哆嗦。到闪电划过天空，雷声滚滚而来时，斑比已经吓得全身麻木，以为世界末日来临了。他跟在鹿妈妈身后跑，当时鹿妈妈也有点六神无主，在灌木丛中来来回回地走动。那时候，斑比脑子里什么也没想，也不明白发生了什么。大雨像狂吼的溪水一般敲打着树林，所有动物都在四处找避雨的地方。很快，树林里就没有动物的踪影了，但是大家还是没有躲过大雨的袭击，因为就连林间最茂密的灌木丛也被雨水淋湿了。不一会儿，闪电消失了，树梢处刺眼的白光也见不到了，雷声渐渐远去，斑比一开始还能听见远处有雷声，不一会儿就什么声响都没有了。雨点变小了，更加均匀、整齐地落在斑比周围。这样过去了一小时，雨终于停了。在这一片宁静中，森林伫立一旁大口呼吸，任由身上的雨水滴落。现在，谁都也不会害怕从林间走出来了，因为雨水已经把那害怕的感觉冲得一干二净。

那天傍晚，鹿妈妈很早就带斑比去草地了。出发的时候天色还未变暗，以前从来没去这么早过。太阳正高挂在天上，空气无比清新，

比以往更加甜美，树林里各种声音不绝于耳，每个动物都从避雨处走出来，兴奋地奔走，彼此交谈刚刚发生的一切。

在到达草地之前，他们要经过一棵高大的橡树，那棵树就在森林的边上，靠近他们小径的地方。每次去草地，他们都得经过那棵又美丽又高大的橡树。

这一次，松鼠坐在树枝上迎接他们。斑比和松鼠是好朋友。第一次见面时，松鼠惊讶地盯着斑比，斑比看他穿着红红的外套，还误以为遇见了一只小鹿。不过那会儿斑比太小了，什么都还不知道。

从那次开始，斑比见着松鼠就很高兴。松鼠礼貌待人，非常健谈。斑比喜欢看它爬树、跳跃、翻滚，还有在树上保持平衡。有时正说着话，松鼠就在光滑的树干上上下下跳蹿，或者跳到摇摇晃晃的树枝上，稳稳坐在上面，身子直立着，露出白色的胸脯，前爪大方地握在胸前，毛茸茸的大尾巴优雅地垂在身后，不时冲这边点点头，朝那边点点头，两眼透露着笑意，一眨眼工夫就告诉斑比好多有趣的事儿。

看见斑比和鹿妈妈走过来，松鼠猛地晃动自己长长的尾巴，在斑比和鹿妈妈头上向他们打招呼：“你们好，你们好，看见你们来真是高兴。”斑比和鹿妈妈应声停下脚步。

松鼠从树干上跑下来。“嗨，”他和他们聊起来，“今儿个还好吧？嗯，我看出来一切还挺好，这是最重要的。”

接着，松鼠又闪电般爬到树上，然后说：“对我来说，下面太湿了，等下，我得找个更好的地方，希望你们别介意。哈哈，我知道你们不会的。这样子我们也可以好好说话。”

他在笔直的树干上不停来回跑。“刚才太可怕了，”他说，“声音那么大，你们都不知道我有多害怕。我像一只胆小鼠一样，躲在角落里，动都不敢动。我最烦的就是不得不那样坐着，还不能动。我知道

大家都希望不要发生糟糕的事情，我的这棵树呢，它表现很棒，没有出什么问题。我得说，谁也不可否认这是一棵好树。我对它太满意了。有了这棵树，我就不想再找其他的树了。不过要是再像今天这样，估计在哪里都得心惊胆战。”

松鼠边说边坐直身子，靠着竖起的大尾巴稳住自己，露出大白胸脯，两个爪子还是护在胸口。不用再多说什么，我们也相信刚才他真是被吓坏了。

“我们要到草地去，去太阳底下把身上的水晒干。”鹿妈妈说。

“好主意，”松鼠大声说，“你们真是聪明，我就经常说鹿很聪明。”他说着，纵身一跃跳到了更高的枝条上去。“现在去草地上再好不过了，”他俯身对他们说道，然后轻巧地攀上树梢。“我到上面能晒着太阳的地方去了。”他愉快地说，“浑身都湿透了，我直接去最高处了。”松鼠说完继续往上爬，根本没有留心下面的斑比和鹿妈妈是不是还在听他讲话。

草地上一片生机盎然。斑比的野兔朋友在那里，他还带来了自己的家人。埃娜阿姨和她的孩子已经在那里了，还有几个熟识的朋友。那天，斑比再次见着了他们的父辈，他们从森林的另一端缓缓走出来，不过比上次多了一只鹿。他们在草地上慢慢地来回走，从不看其他动物，彼此之间也不说一句话。斑比多次观察他们，心中充满了好奇和敬畏之情。

后来，斑比就和费琳、戈博还有其他几个小鹿一起聊天了。斑比建议大家玩一会儿，所有人都同意了，于是，大家开始玩绕圈跑的游戏。费琳是玩得最开心的一个，她敏捷、活泼，不断想出好点子，但是戈博不一会儿就累了，他被刚才的暴风雨吓得不轻，心里还回响着“隆隆隆”和“唧唧唧”的声音。戈博身上有很脆弱的地方，但是即使这样，斑比也很喜欢他，因为他善良，乐于助人，而且还总带着一

点让人不易察觉的忧郁。

时间慢慢地溜走，斑比渐渐知道草地上的青草是多么美味，嫩叶芽和苜蓿是多么柔嫩甜美了。可是渐渐地，当他靠近鹿妈妈，想依偎她的时候，鹿妈妈却经常推开他。

“你已经不是小孩子了。”她总是这样说。有时，鹿妈妈还会粗鲁地说：“走开，让我安静一会儿。”有时候，在大白天，鹿妈妈就会离开他们那块空地，也不注意斑比是否在后面跟着。有时候，斑比和鹿妈妈一起漫步在熟悉的小道上，鹿妈妈好像有意不去在意斑比的去向，不管他是不是在身后，是不是跟着她走。

直到有一天，鹿妈妈不见了。斑比从没想过会发生这种事情，他想不明白这到底是怎么一回事。可是，鹿妈妈确实不见了，斑比第一次变成了孤身一个。

斑比急得四处走，他焦虑不安，担心不已，他现在非常需要妈妈。他伤心地站在那里呼喊妈妈，但是一直没有得到回应，也没有谁出现。

他认真地听四周的声响，认真嗅闻空气的味道，可是什么也闻不见。他继续呼喊：“妈妈，妈妈！”声音听起来那么无力，那么伤心，那么催人泪下，可是还是没有得到任何回应，也没有任何人出现。

绝望开始在斑比心里滋生，他无法忍受，开始往外走。

他沿着熟悉的小径寻找，边走边喊，迈着犹豫不决的步子越走越远。斑比很害怕，很无助，也很沮丧。

他继续往前走啊走，踏上以前从没有去过的小径，经过许多陌生的地方，最后，斑比迷路了，不知道自己是在哪里。

突然，他听见另外两个孩子像自己一样在呼唤：“妈妈，妈

妈！”他静静站着听，那不就是戈博和费琳吗？对，一定是他俩。

他迅速朝着声音发出的地方跑去，很快就看见红色的外套在树叶间晃动。戈博和费琳肩并肩站在一棵山茱萸旁边，正在悲伤地喊：“妈妈——妈妈——”

听到树丛里有响声，戈博和费琳都高兴得不得了，可一看是斑比而不是他们的妈妈，又都失望了。不过，看见小伙伴，他俩还是觉得得到了一点安慰。斑比也很高兴，因为他不再是独自一个了。

“我的妈妈不见了。”斑比告诉他们。

“我们的妈妈也不见了。”戈博伤心地说。

他们站在那里，你看看我，我看看你，都非常失望。

“你们说，她们会去哪里了呢？”斑比几乎是用抽泣的声音在问。

“不知道。”戈博叹了口气，心怦怦跳，感到很痛苦。

费琳突然来了一句：“我猜她们可能和我们的父亲在一起。”

戈博和斑比吃惊地看着费琳，对她的这个说法表示崇拜。

“你的意思是她们去看望我们的父亲了？”斑比颤抖地说。

费琳也在发抖，不过她故作镇定，装作自己好像知道很多的样子，其实她什么都不知道，连自己这个想法从哪里冒出来的也不知道。

不过，当斑比重复问她：“你真的这样认为吗？”

她依旧装作深思熟虑，然后神秘地说：“对，我就是这样想的。”

毕竟，现在有了一个猜测，可以往这方面好好想想，可是斑比并没有觉得事情变得简单了，他甚至不会往这方面想，他实在是太担忧、太伤心了。

斑比不愿意待在同一个地方，就继续朝前走，戈博和费琳跟着他走了一会儿，三个孩子都在呼唤：“妈妈，妈妈！”

后来，戈博和费琳停住了脚步，他们不敢再走远了。

“我们为什么要往前走呢？妈妈知道我们在哪里，我们得待在这里，等妈妈回来，她就能找着我们了啊。”费琳说。

斑比独自向前走，他穿过一片树林，来到一块不大的空地上，走到空地中央的时候，斑比突然停下来，感觉自己像被钉在了地上一样，无法挪动脚步。

空地边上有一棵高大的榛树，就在那树下站着一个庞然大物。斑比从未见过这样的生物，也从来没有闻过空气中的这种味道。这气味奇异、浓烈、呛鼻，对斑比来说是全然陌生的，这味道快让斑比发疯了。

斑比盯着那个怪物，他挺直地站在那里，脸色灰白，身材瘦削，鼻子和眼睛周围都没有毛发，脸上透射出一股冷峻的、令人恐惧的力量。斑比被那张脸吸引住了，即使这张脸让他感受到无法忍受的痛苦，他还是站在那里，目不转睛地盯着那个生物。

那个生物就那样一动不动地站在那里，过了很长一段时间，他竟然从脑袋附近伸出来一条腿，斑比之前都没有注意那里有一条腿。看着那个生物伸出那条可怕的腿，斑比一溜烟就跑了，他跑出那个树林，飞快地往回跑。

这时，鹿妈妈出现了，她跟着斑比一起飞奔。他们肩并肩以最快的速度向前跑。鹿妈妈知道该往什么地方走，她在前领路，斑比跟在

后面，直到跑回属于他们的那个林间空地才停下来。

“你看见他了吗？”鹿妈妈轻声问。

斑比没有回答，他现在上气不接下气，只能点点头。

“就是他！”鹿妈妈说。

斑比和妈妈不约而同地战栗起来。

第六章

现在，斑比常常独自待着，但他不像第一次那样不安了。鹿妈妈经常会消失，不管斑比怎样呼唤，她就是不出现，过不了多久，她又会突然出现，然后像以前一样待在斑比身边。

一天晚上，斑比独自外出。在路上，连戈博和费琳都没有遇见，他再次感到孤独和绝望向自己袭来。天色开始由灰白变成灰暗，树顶就像盖在灌木丛上的穹隆。突然，树丛中传来一阵奔跑声，鹿妈妈从里面跑出来，后面还有一只鹿跟着。斑比不知道后面是埃娜阿姨，自己的父亲，还是其他鹿，但他认出来跑在前面的是自己的妈妈。尽管她只是从斑比身边一闪而过，但斑比还是听出来那是自己妈妈的声音。他听见妈妈在尖叫，像是在嬉戏玩闹，不过斑比觉得那声音里还夹杂着一丝害怕。

这一天，斑比独自在灌木丛中走了好久好久。最后他觉得自己再也不能忍受这种孤独，感觉自己很快就会陷入绝望之中，所以开始大声呼唤他的妈妈。

突然，斑比面前出现了一只雄鹿，他正严厉地盯着斑比，这把斑比吓了一跳！因为斑比什么声音都没有听见。这只雄鹿比其他雄鹿看起来更威风、更高大、更神气，他背上的红色斑点比其他鹿身上的斑点颜色更深、更鲜艳，银灰色的脸闪闪发光，耳朵上面一对鹿角高悬，上面长满了大颗黑珍珠状的东西。

“你在哭什么？”老鹿语气严肃地问。斑比对这声音敬畏有加，可同时又被吓得不停发抖，不敢开口回答。“你的妈妈现在没时间管你。”老鹿继续说。斑比完全被这威严的声音征服了，心里不由地产生了一股崇拜之情。“难道你不能独自生活吗？你真是丢脸！”

斑比想告诉他，自己能独自生活，而且经常是独自一人，但是他开不了口。他只是乖乖听着老鹿说话，为自己感到羞耻。老鹿说完转身就走了，和出现的时候一样悄无声息。斑比不知道他去了哪里，不知道他是怎么离开的，不知道他走的时候速度飞快还是缓慢。斑比竖起耳朵使劲听，可还是听不到老鹿离开的脚步声，也听不到树叶摇动的声音，所以他想老鹿一定还在附近，于是他拼命嗅闻四周的空气，可空气中一丝老鹿的气息都没有。看来老鹿是真的离开了，斑比松了口气，不过内心又极度渴望再见到他，渴望赢得他的赞许。

鹿妈妈回来时，斑比并没有告诉她这件事。从那以后，即使鹿妈妈再度消失不见，斑比也不会呼唤她了。当他出去闲逛时，他总会想到那只老鹿，渴望再次碰见他，并且想告诉他：“您看，我再也不会找妈妈了。”他想，那只老鹿听完后一定会夸奖自己。

后来，斑比在草地上遇见戈博、费琳，把这件事告诉了他们，他俩听得津津有味，一时都找不到比这还有意思的事情。

“你当时有没有被吓住？”戈博激动地问。

这个嘛——斑比承认自己被吓住了，不过，只有一点点惊恐而已。

“要是我，肯定害怕得要死。”戈博说。

“我倒没有很害怕，因为那只鹿太英俊了。”斑比告诉戈博。

“那我也会害怕，”戈博说，“我肯定都不敢看他，我一害怕就会眼冒金星，什么都看不见，心还会咚咚乱跳，喘不过气来。”

听斑比讲完这件事后，费琳什么也没说，只是在一边静静地思考。

再次相遇时，戈博和费琳急匆匆向斑比跑过去。斑比还是独自一

人，他俩也是。“斑比，我们一直在找你。”戈博大声说。“是的，”费琳认真说，“因为我们现在知道你上次遇见的那只老鹿是谁了。”斑比好奇心大起，跃向空中，问道：“是谁？”

费琳郑重地说：“他是老鹿王。”

“谁告诉你的？”斑比问。

“我妈妈告诉我的。”费琳回答。

听费琳这么一说，斑比很惊讶：“你们把整件事都告诉了她？”戈博和费琳都点了点头。“可这是一个秘密啊。”斑比生气地说。

戈博立马为自己开脱，说：“我没说，是费琳说的。”费琳叫起来：“什么意思？怎么是秘密？我就是想知道他是谁。现在我们都知道了，不是更刺激好玩吗？”

斑比心里面特别想知道关于老鹿王的一切事情，也就没有生气了。

费琳把自己知道的都告诉了他：“老鹿王是森林里最大的一只鹿，没有谁能与之媲美。谁也不知道他活了多久，不知道他住在哪里，也都不认识他的家人。他很少露面。有时，大家很久都没见到他，就认为他已经死了，可后来有动物又看见他，就知道他还活着。没有哪个动物敢问他去了哪里。他不和任何鹿说话，大家也都不敢和他讲话。他走的小径，其他鹿都没有走过。他知道森林最深处在哪里，他敢去那里，因为他从来不知道危险是什么。别的鹿偶尔会相互打斗，有时候是嬉戏，有时候是彼此竞争或者动真格的，但是这么多年来，还没有哪只鹿和老鹿王较量过。在很久之前，那些和老鹿王搏斗过的鹿都已经死了，只有他还活着。他就是伟大的老鹿王。”

斑比原谅了戈博和费琳把他的秘密告诉给埃娜阿姨。听了这么多关于老鹿王的重要消息，他心里甚至觉得十分欣喜，不过更让他觉得

高兴的是自己并没有把所有事情都告诉他俩。戈博和费琳还不知道老鹿王曾经呵斥斑比的那句话，“难道你不能独自生活吗？你真是丢脸！”此刻，斑比很庆幸没有告诉他们这些事，不然他们也会把这告诉埃娜阿姨了，到时候整个森林就都开始胡乱闲扯了。

那天晚上，月亮升起的时候，鹿妈妈又回来了。鹿妈妈站在草地边上的橡树旁，四下寻找斑比，斑比突然看见鹿妈妈，立刻向她跑过去。

那晚，斑比又知道了一些新的东西。鹿妈妈又累又饿，他们并没有像以前那样在草地上走很远，鹿妈妈仅仅是在草地上解决饥饿，斑比也习惯在那一片吃草。他俩肩并肩，一边走，一边愉快地啃着树叶，走着走着就走进了树林深处。

没过一会儿，树丛里传来巨大的沙沙声，斑比还没有来得及猜想是什么东西，鹿妈妈就和平日里受到惊吓或者极度兴奋的反应一样，开始大声乱叫了。“呦！”鹿妈妈大叫着跳到空中，刚停下来又叫：“呦！噢！”树丛中的动静越来越大，斑比试着辨别朝自己走来的是谁。现在他们离斑比足够近了，他们看起来长得很像斑比、鹿妈妈、埃娜阿姨和家族里的其他鹿，不过他们的身躯更加魁梧、更加强壮。光看着他们，斑比就觉得自己已经被征服了。

斑比突然开始叫了起来：“呦！噢——噢！”他情不自禁地大叫，几乎没有意识到自己在叫喊。那支队伍慢慢地从他们身边走过，三只、四只……雄壮的身影一个接着一个，最后那个是最高大的，颈上有厚厚的鬃毛，头上的角长得像小树一样。看着这些高大的身影，斑比就紧张得喘不过来气，他以前从来没有这样奇怪的感觉，心里全是疑惑，他站在那里不停地叫。斑比很害怕，但是这种害怕和平常的害怕还不一样。他觉得自己太渺小了，连自己的妈妈这时候看起来也很渺小。他不知道为什么会这样，只是感到羞愧，同时，也感到恐惧，所以他呼叫着：“呦！噢！”那样叫上一阵，斑比就感觉好多了。

那支队伍已经消失了，现在什么也看不见，什么也听不见了。鹿妈妈也安静下来了，只有斑比还处于惊吓中，不时发出惊恐的叫声。

“别叫了，”鹿妈妈说，“他们已经走了。”

“哦，妈妈，”斑比低声问，“他们是谁啊？”

“这个，”鹿妈妈说，“其实说到底，他们并不是很危险的。他们是麋鹿，是我们的亲戚，他们很有势力，很强壮，比我们强大多了。”

“难道他们不危险吗？”斑比问。

“一般情况下，是这样的。”鹿妈妈解释说，“当然，发生过很多事情，关于他们的传闻也不少，但是我不知道那些传闻是不是值得相信，因为他们从来没有伤害过我和我的朋友。”

“如果他们是我们的亲戚，为什么还要伤害我们呢？”斑比问妈妈，他想平静下来，可身体还是不由自主地颤抖。

“嗯，他们从不会伤害我们，”鹿妈妈说，“但是不知道为什么，每次看见他们，我就觉得害怕。我也不明白自己为什么会这样，但是每次都这样。”

鹿妈妈的话使斑比慢慢平静下来，但他依旧没有停止自己的思考。鸣角鸮站在斑比头上方的桤木枝丫上，发出极其吓人的叫声，斑比正在想问题，就忘记装成被吓坏的样子。鸣角鸮并不知情，他飞过去问斑比：“我是不是有吓着你啊？”

“是啊，”斑比回答他，“你总是这样吓我。”

鸣角鸮轻轻地咯咯笑，他很开心。“我希望你不要因此生我的气，”他说，“我不是故意的。”说完，他把自己泡沫般的羽毛弄得蓬松起来，还摆出一副精明、严肃的面孔。他对自己的表现十分满意。

斑比向他坦白。“你知道吗？”斑比迟疑地说，“其实在你之前我被吓得更厉害。”

“那好吧！”鸣角鸮不满地说。

斑比把刚才遇见体型庞大的亲戚一事告诉了他。

“别给我说亲戚什么的！”鸣角鸮大声嚷，“我也有亲戚，不过因为我只在白天飞来飞去，所以他们都很讨厌我。得了吧，亲戚一点用都没有。如果他们比你强大，不会对你有所好处，你也受不了他们的骄傲；如果他们比你弱小，就更没用了，他们也无法忍受你的骄傲。我倒宁愿自己没有什么亲戚。”

“但是，我都不认识我自己的亲戚。”斑比说，他羞涩地笑了笑，“在这之前，我没听说过他们，也没有见过他们。”

“别为所谓的亲戚烦恼了，”鸣角鸮劝他，“相信我，”他意味深长地转了转眼珠，“相信我，亲戚永远比不上朋友。看看咱俩，怎么说我们都不可能是亲戚，但是我们是很好的朋友，这可比亲戚关系强多了。”

斑比想说点什么，但鸣角鸮没给他机会，又继续说道：“我经历过许多这种事情，你还太年轻，不过，相信我，我比你清楚。再说，我并不想扯进家族纠纷中去。”说完，鸣角鸮若有所思地眨了眨眼睛，严肃的脸庞让斑比沉默起来。

第七章

又是一夜过去，这天早上，发生了一件奇怪的事情。

这个清晨，天气晴朗，空气清新，露水浸润了整个森林。无论是长在高大乔木上的叶子，还是生在低矮灌木丛上的叶子，每一片闻起来都突然变得香甜无比。草地上也散发出阵阵香气，那美妙的气味飘荡着，一直飘到树顶上。

天还是灰蒙蒙的，几只小山雀醒来，轻声地“啾啾”两声，又安静了下来。有好一段时间，森林里都是一片寂静。随后，一只乌鸦嘶哑刺耳的尖叫划破宁静，呀——！其他乌鸦也醒来了，他们开始在树梢间飞蹿。喜鹊被他们吵醒了，不满地说：“嘿呀！我说，难道你们不知道我在睡觉吗？”接着，四下里就响起上百种微小的回应声——“啾啾”，“唧唧”，“咻”……声音从很远的地方传来，听得出来黑暗还没有褪去，大家都还是睡眼惺忪呢。

突然，一只画眉鸟飞到山毛榉的树梢，站在最高处那根直入云霄的枝干上，向远处望。她的目光掠过远处的树海，注视着遥远东方的天空，夜色正在消散，天空泛起了鱼肚白，变得鲜活起来，然后她开始歌唱起来。

由于她站得又高又远，身体又是小小黑黑的，所以看起来就像一个小黑点，也像一片小小的枯叶。她纵情歌唱，歌声响彻了整个森林。现在，森林开始骚动起来了。小雀鸟叽叽喳喳，红胸雀、金翅雀也开始歌唱。鸽子忙着从这个地方飞到那个地方，不断地扇动翅膀。野鸡“咯咯咯咯”叫，嗓子就像被撕裂了似的，当它们从鸡窝跳到地上时，晃动的翅膀也发出了声音，那声音虽然很轻柔却充满力量，然后就没再也没有停止过鸣叫了。高空中的隼大叫起来：“呀！呀！

呀！”声音很尖利，但也很愉快。

太阳升起来了。

“嘀哟哩！”黄鹂鸟儿在树枝间飞来飞去，高兴地歌唱，黄色的身体圆圆滚滚，在晨光中就像一个正在飞舞的金球。

斑比走在大橡树底下的草地上。草叶上挂着晶莹的露珠，空气里弥漫着青草、花儿和土壤的味道，成千上万的小生命正窃窃私语。朋友野兔已经在草地上了，好像是在思考什么重要的事情。一只神气活现的野鸡在缓缓散步，一圈泛着金属光泽的深蓝色羽毛在阳光下闪闪发光，他一边啄食地上的草籽，一边警惕地观察四周。

就在离斑比不远的地方，有一只公鹿站在那里，身体被树枝挡住了一点，他就站在斑比正前方靠近榛树丛的地方。这还是斑比第一次离父辈这么近。斑比没有挪动脚步，他等着公鹿从榛树丛里走出来，他也在考虑是不是要鼓起勇气和他说话。斑比想问问鹿妈妈，便到处找她，但鹿妈妈早就走开了，现在正在很远的地方和埃娜阿姨漫步。这时候，戈博和费琳也从树林里走出来了。斑比还站在那里，如果他现在去妈妈那边，那就必定要从榛树丛里的那只公鹿身边走过，斑比觉得自己根本做不到这一点。

“好吧，”斑比心想，“我不一定要先问妈妈。反正老鹿王对我说话，我也没有告诉她。就说一句‘早上好，大叔’，他应该不会因此生气。不过万一真是生气了，那我就赶紧跑开。”斑比自己在那里犹豫，一会儿想走过去打招呼，一会儿又变得不敢上前。

这时，那只公鹿走出榛树丛，向草地走去。

“那现在……”斑比心里还在想。

突然，草地上传来一声雷鸣般的巨响。

斑比不知道发生了什么，吓得急忙缩成一团。他看见公鹿跳起来，从他身边一跃而过，冲进了森林里。

“轰……轰……”巨大的声音还在森林里回响。斑比茫然无措地看着周围，他看见妈妈和埃娜阿姨、戈博以及费琳都逃进了树林，他看见野兔发疯一样跑开了，还有伸长脖子的野鸡也没命地跑着，他发现整个森林突然安静了下来。于是他也开始向灌木丛跑去，刚跑几步就看见刚才那只公鹿躺在自己面前。斑比停下来，惊恐万分，不知道眼前这一幕这意味着什么。那只公鹿一动不动躺在地上，肩上裂了一个大口，鲜血直往外淌，他已经死了。

“别停在那里！”斑比的耳边传来一个命令，是鹿妈妈的声音。她正从斑比身边狂奔过去。“快跑，”鹿妈妈大喊，“拼命跑！”她一边喊，一边奋力向前跑。斑比听了鹿妈妈的命令，也使出全身力气，跟着鹿妈妈往前跑。

“妈妈，发生什么了？”斑比问，“到底怎么了，妈妈？”

鹿妈妈喘着气，费劲地回答：“是——他！”

斑比哆嗦了一下，继续往前跑，最后终于因为喘不过气而停下来。

“你刚才说什么？给我说说，你刚刚说的是什么？”一个微小的声音从树上传来。斑比抬头看，原来是松鼠，他正从树枝上跑下来。

“我一路都跟着你们在跑，”他说，“太可怕了。”

“刚才你也在那里吗？”鹿妈妈问。

“是啊，我当然在。”松鼠回答，“现在我还全身颤抖呢。”松鼠说着挺直腰板，靠在自己的大尾巴上，露出雪白的大胸脯，前爪还是习惯性地护在胸前，然后说：“我刚刚魂都没有了。”

“我也被吓坏了。”鹿妈妈说，“我真不明白，谁也没有发现有情况啊。”

“真的吗？”松鼠有些生气地说，“我之前就看见他了。”

“我也看见了。”喜鹊飞过来，站在树枝上和他们说。

“我也看见了。”白蜡树上响起粗哑的声音，一只松鸦也随声附和。

“我们也看见他了。”几只乌鸦在树顶用嘶哑的嗓音说。

大家围坐在一起，讨论着，一个个激动不已，咬牙切齿，又都心有余悸的样子。

“他们在说谁呢？”斑比心想，“他们都看见谁了呢？”

“我尽力了，”松鼠还是保持先前的姿势，前爪护在胸口，“我尽了最大努力去提醒那只可怜的鹿。”

“我也是，”松鸦粗声粗气地说，“我冲他喊了那么多声，但是他就是不听我的。”

“他也没听见我叫他。”喜鹊满腹牢骚，“我至少叫了他十声。我估计他没有听见，就想飞到他正上方去。我心想在榛树丛上叫他，他应该听见了，可是事情就在这时候发生了。”

“我的声音可能比你的还大，我也尽可能地提醒他，”乌鸦的语气不大礼貌，“可那位绅士吧，像他们这样的大人物，根本没把我们放在眼里。”

“是啊，太不把我们放在眼里了。”松鼠赞同道。

“行了，虽然发生了意外，”喜鹊说，“但我们尽力了，就没必要自

责了。”

“可惜这么英俊的鹿了。”松鼠遗憾地说道，“他现在还正是盛年。”

“唉，”松鸦在一旁嘟哝，“他要是不那么自大，听听我们的警告，也不至于落到这么悲惨的地步。”

“我觉得他一点也不自大。”

“和其他鹿比起来，他确实不算自大。”喜鹊接着说。

“那就是愚蠢。”松鸦不屑地说。

“你自己才蠢呢，”树上的乌鸦向下吼，“你还说他蠢，整个森林都知道你有多蠢！”

“我？”松鸦怔住了，“谁也不能说我蠢，我也就记性不大好，我一点都不蠢，好不好？”

“那你就这么想去吧，”乌鸦一本正经地说，“你可以不把我刚说的话当一回事，但是你要知道，这只鹿之所以死，不是因为他自大，也不是因为他愚蠢，而是因为谁也逃不过他的手掌心。”

“哼！”松鸦不耐烦了，气呼呼地说，“我可不喜欢和你讨论这些。”说完他就飞走了。

乌鸦继续说：“他比我们家族所有成员都要聪明，他想杀谁就杀谁，我们没有任何办法。”

“我们只能多加小心，严防警惕。”喜鹊打断他。

“也只能这样了，”乌鸦难过地说，“保重！”他说完也飞走了，其他同伴跟着他一起飞走了。

斑比打探了一下四周，发现妈妈已经离开了。

斑比心里想：“他们在聊什么啊？我真不知道他们说的是什么，‘他’到底是谁呢？在榛树丛里看见的那只公鹿也是‘他’，可那个‘他’并没有杀我啊。”

斑比脑海里浮现出那只公鹿倒在血泊里，肩上裂着口的样子，他现在已经死了。斑比独自往前走。森林里又开始响起许许多多声音，明晃晃的太阳光从树顶射下来，到处都是亮堂堂的，树叶散发出香味，隼在高空歌唱，附近一只啄木鸟在“唧 唧”地敲打树干，好像什么也没有发生过。斑比却心情沉重，他感觉有一股黑暗的力量时刻威胁着他，他觉得生存如此艰难，时刻都会有危险，不明白其他动物怎么能这么无忧无虑，这么有说有笑。此刻，他心里燃起一种欲望，想要继续走，一直走到树林最深处，去寻找一个避身之处，一个被浓密树丛遮盖严实的地方，躲在里面谁也看不见他。他再也不想去草地上走了。

这时，旁边灌木丛里发出细微的声音。斑比发现老鹿王正站在他前方，猛地后退了几步。

斑比惊慌失措，想要逃走，但还是让自己镇定下来。老鹿王用深邃的目光看着他：“你刚才是不是也在草地上？”

“是的。”斑比小声地回地答老鹿王，他的小心脏都快跳出嗓子眼儿了。

“你妈妈在哪呢？”老鹿王问他。

斑比的声音依旧很小：“我不知道。”

老鹿王还盯着斑比：“那你怎么不呼喊她，怎么不找她呢？”

斑比抬头看看老鹿王高贵的、灰白色的脸庞，又看看老鹿王的鹿

角，突然鼓起勇气说：“我现在也能独自生活了。”

老鹿王想了一会儿，然后温柔地问斑比：“难道你就是不久前哭着找妈妈的那只小鹿？”

斑比感到有点尴尬，但他的勇气还没有消失，所以勇敢地向老鹿王坦白：“是的，我就是那只小鹿。”

老鹿王没有说话，只是这样看着斑比。斑比觉得老鹿王的眼神不仅深邃，而且还很温柔。

“您之前骂过我。”斑比大声说，“因为那时候我不敢独自生活，但从那以后，我就不怕了。”

老鹿王赞许地看着斑比，露出一丝不易察觉的微笑，但斑比还是看见了。“尊贵的鹿王，”他满怀信心问道，“刚刚发生什么了？我不知道他们口中的他是谁。”说到这里，斑比突然停了下来，因为老鹿王用愠怒的眼神看了他一眼。

过了一会儿，老鹿王把目光从斑比身上移向远处，然后缓缓地说：“你要自己去听，去嗅，去观察，你自己去找出答案吧。”他抬高长着鹿角的头，说了一句“保重”，然后就消失了。

斑比愣在原处，难过得想哭。但老鹿王那句“保重”还在耳边回响，那一句话给了他坚强的力量。他想：“老鹿王对我说了这句话，那他这次一定没有生我的气。”

此时此刻，斑比备受鼓舞，为自己感到自豪。生命确实充满艰险，但是无论发生什么，他都要学会去承受。

他慢慢地向森林深处走去。

第八章

草地边上的那棵橡树开始落叶了，所有的树都开始落叶了。

橡树上，有一根树枝比其他所有枝杈都要高，它直直地延伸到草地上空，上面只有两片树叶紧紧相依。

“现在和过去完全不一样啦。”其中一片对另一片说。

“是啊！”另外一片回答，“今晚好多伙伴都离开了枝头，现在估计只剩我们两个了。”

“唉！也不知道下一个会轮到谁，”第一片开口的树叶说，“虽然之前有太阳，天气也暖和，可谁知道会不时袭来暴风雨，许多年轻的伙伴就是因此凋落的，谁也不知道下一个会是谁。”

“现在不怎么出太阳了。”另外一片树叶叹了口气，“即使有太阳，也没有什么温度，我们要有温暖的天气才行。”

“不知道这是不是真的，”第一片树叶说，“他们说，等我们离开后，原来的位置上会长出新的叶子，等新的叶子飘落后，还会有新的叶子长出来，然后一代一代，会出现更多新生的叶子。”

“确实是啊。”第二片树叶低声说，“我们甚至难以想象到时候会是什么情况，那超出了我们的能力范围。”

“这真让我觉得难受。”第一片树叶接着说。

他们沉默了一会儿，第一片树叶轻轻地自言自语起来：“为什么我们一定要脱落呢？……”

另一片树叶轻轻地问：“我们从枝头落下去会怎样呢？”

“会不断往下沉……”

“我们下面是什么？”

“我也不知道，有的说会这样，有的说会那样，众说不一，可谁也不知道到底会是什么情况。”

“落下去后，我们还会有感觉吗？还会感觉到自己的存在吗？”

“谁知道呢？落下去的伙伴没有一个回来告诉我们在下面是什么感觉。”

他俩又陷入了沉默。

过了一会儿。第一片树叶亲切地说：“别去担心这些了，你看你都在颤抖了。”

“没关系，”第二片树叶回答，“我现在动不动就会发抖，我感觉自己不如以前站得稳了。”

“我们还是先不要讨论这些事了。”第一片树叶说。

另一片回答：“不，就这样吧，不然我们又说点什么好呢？”说完他沉默了片刻，然后接着说：“我们当中，谁会先落下去呢？”

第一片树叶安慰他说：“别去担心这个了。让我们想想过去的美好时光吧。那时候多么美妙啊，太阳照在身上暖暖的，我们都充满了活力。你还记不记得清晨的露水，还有那些静谧、美好的夜晚？”

“可现在的夜晚太可怕了。”第二片树叶抱怨道，“而且夜晚特别漫长。”

“朋友，我们不应该抱怨，”第一片树叶柔声说，“因为我们比好多好多伙伴都活得久。”

“我是不是完全变了样了？”另一个下定决心向唯一的伙伴询问，语气藏不住羞怯。

“不，你一点也没变。”第一片树叶肯定地说，“你这样想肯定是因为看见我变得又黄又丑，不过你真的一点也没有变。”

“你这是安慰我吧。”第二片树叶说。

“不是，”第一片树叶焦急地告诉对方，“相信我，你和新出生那会儿一样可爱，虽然有的地方有一点点黄点，但是几乎看不出来，反倒让你显得更加好看。你要相信我。”

“谢谢你，”第二片树叶很感动，喃喃地说道，“我知道事实并不像你所说的那样，但我要谢谢你，因为你这么善良，你总是对我这么好。我现在才开始意识到你的心灵是多么美好。”

“嘘，快别说了。”第一片树叶对他说。说了这一句，她也安静下来，因为她都快说不出话了。

两片树叶安安静静地度过了一个又一个小时。

一阵潮湿的风吹过，冷漠无情地扫过树梢。

“啊，现在，”第二片树叶说：“我……”话还没说完就已离开枝头，慢慢往下坠。

冬天来了。

第九章

斑比发现世界在慢慢变化，而自己却难以适应这个变化后的世界。过去，草儿丰盛，斑比理所当然地认为一直都会有足够的食物，认为自己永远不会为填饱肚子而发愁。他认为自己永远都可以睡在那块绿叶笼罩的空地上，谁也不会发现他，认为自己永远都可以穿着柔顺、漂亮、光鲜的红色小外套四处漫步。显然，现在的日子就像富豪遇到了最萧条的时期。

不知不觉中，一切都在改变，可斑比几乎没有察觉。他觉得在这个变化过程中，自己只经历了几个片段。斑比喜欢草地上的那层薄雾，奶白奶白的，如一层薄纱，它们或是在清晨笼罩大地，或是在黎明之际突然吞噬苍白的天空，等太阳出来，又悄然散去。他也钟情于给整个草地铺上一层银色地毯的白霜。偶尔，斑比喜欢倾听高大的亲戚——麋鹿的呼喊，他们一旦开口，那威严、嘹亮的声音就会响彻整个森林。他还记得麋鹿拥有像小树一样高而壮的角，斑比觉得他们的声音和他们头上的角一样震撼人心。斑比醉心于倾听他们低沉有力的呼喊，每一次听见都会一动不动站在那里，心里充满崇拜之情。斑比觉得那声音就像一股原始的力量在咆哮，向外透射出渴望、愤怒和自豪。这声音让斑比觉得害怕，甚至无法忍受，虽然每次都与内心的恐惧作斗争，但是他从没有战胜过那份恐惧，尽管如此，他也为自己拥有这样高贵的亲戚感到自豪，同时心里有些酸楚，因为这些亲戚实在难以亲近。斑比自己也说不清为什么，就是经常感到不舒服，觉得自己被羞辱了一样。

直到寻偶季节过去，公鹿不再疯狂喊叫，斑比才开始注意到其他事情。夜晚在森林里漫步或者白天躺在自己的小窝时，斑比总能听见落叶窃窃私语，总能看见树叶离开树梢和枝头“哗啦啦”地掉在地上，发出银铃般清脆的声音。在这样神秘、忧郁的声音中，无论是安然入

睡还是苏醒过来都是十分美妙的事情。日复一日，地上的落叶铺满厚厚一层，松松软软的，一踩上去叶子就会到处乱飞，还会发出动听的沙沙声。它们堆得太高了，好玩的是每走一步，可以把落叶推到两边，听它们发出“沙拉——沙拉”的声音，悦耳、清脆、纯净。这些落叶还很有用，这段时间，斑比需要更加仔细地听闻周遭的声响、气味，可有了它们，他不费力就能听见远处的一切声音。不管谁用最轻的脚步走过，落叶也会“沙拉——沙拉”地响。

没过多久，雨季就到了。从清晨到深夜，雨水都倾盆不止。有时候，一整晚都在下雨，到第二天都还在继续，中间稍停一会儿，但很快又席卷而来。空气潮湿又阴冷，整个世界都被雨水浸泡着。在草地上轻轻咬一口草，满嘴都是雨水。只需轻轻拉一下树枝，溪流般的积水就从上面流下来，灌满鼻子和眼睛。地上的树叶被浸湿，软塌塌地贴在地面，再也不会发出悦耳的声音了。斑比第一次经历这样的天气，大雨不分昼夜地下，浑身湿透的感觉让斑比十分苦恼。如今的森林再也不像是森林了，斑比讨厌在这湿漉漉的世界走动，他渴望温暖的天气。

接着，刮起了北风，这时斑比才体会到什么是真正的寒冷。一开始，斑比心想依偎着妈妈睡也很好，至少靠着妈妈的那一面是暖和的，但凛冽的风没日没夜地在森林里狂吼，即使依偎着鹿妈妈也没多大用。北风咆哮着，怒号着，似乎想要将树木连根拔起，毁灭整个森林。每棵树都发出“嘎吱嘎吱”的响声，竭尽全力抵抗狂风的屠杀。你能听见树木拉长的呻吟声、叹息般的“嘎吱”声、粗壮枝干断裂时的“咔嚓”声、偶尔树枝被风折断的“噼啪”响，以及枯枝被风撕扯时每一个伤口发出的尖叫声。不过，随着狂风肆虐，除了风声什么也听不到了，因为狂风呼啸的声音盖过了一切声响。

这时，斑比才意识到饥寒交迫的日子来临了，他亲眼目睹了暴风雨如何将这个世界变得面目全非。无论是在树上，还是灌木丛里，都找不到一片叶子。眼前一片光秃秃，只剩下枝干凄凉地杵在那里，等

待上天的怜悯。草地上的青草早已枯萎，仿佛都沉陷入了土壤里，连斑比的小窝也不复存在，之前被树叶遮盖得严严实实，如今叶子掉光了，四面都敞空着，这里再也不是隐秘的藏身之地了。

有一天，一只小喜鹊从草地飞过，她突然感觉有片白色的东西进了眼里，冰冰凉凉的，开始是一片，然后越来越多，洁白晶莹的薄片在她身边飞舞，仿佛眼前被蒙上了一层白纱。喜鹊犹豫了一会儿，然后展翅向高空飞，想躲过这层白纱的纠缠，可她这样也只是徒劳，冰凉的白色薄片到处都是，不断飘进她的眼里。她不停地往上飞，想要飞得再高一些。

“我说，朋友，别费劲啦。”往同一个方向飞的乌鸦看见喜鹊在挣扎，往下喊道：“别费力折腾了，你飞不出去的，这是雪花！”

“雪花？”喜鹊一边惊讶地喊，一边躲着空中的白絮。

“不好意思，”喜鹊说，“我五月才离开鸟窝，我不知道冬天是什么样的。”

“你不知道的还多着呢，”乌鸦回答喜鹊，“但是慢慢的你就知道了。”

“好吧，”喜鹊说，“既然遇见下雪，那我就停下来瞧一瞧吧。”她说完便停在一棵接骨木上，抖了抖身上的雪花。乌鸦笨重地飞走了。

刚开始，斑比看见雪花就欣喜若狂，这些白色“星星”飘落下来后，一切都变样了，空气变得宁静、祥和，斑比觉得整个世界都透亮起来，一旦阳光洒下来，大地的白色新装闪耀着晃眼的银光，到处都是亮闪闪的。

不过，没过多久斑比就开心不起来了，因为下过雪后，食物越来越难找。为了一小块干枯的草皮，他不得不费劲刨开积雪。坚硬的冰雪划伤了他的腿，他害怕自己的脚也被划伤。戈博的脚已经受伤了，

当然戈博向来就无法承受什么，老给埃娜阿姨带来麻烦。

现在，这几只鹿经常待在一起，比以前更亲近了。埃娜阿姨经常带她的孩子过来。最近，一只快要成熟的母鹿也加入了他们，她叫玛丽娜。另一只年老的母鹿艾特拉也经常来。她给大家带来了许多欢乐，但她十分自负，什么事情都有自己的看法，她经常这样说：“不行，我不能老和你们这些小孩子待在一块儿，我早就玩够这些小把戏了。”

费琳问她：“既然是闹着玩的，那多玩几次有什么区别呢？”艾特拉就假装生气的样子说：“问题是它们一点都不有趣，我早就玩够了。”

大家总是围坐在一起聊天，相处得十分愉快，孩子们可从来没有机会像现在这样，听到那么多事情。

有时候，甚至还有一两只公鹿加入他们，在那种时候，刚开始气氛有点尴尬，因为孩子们很害羞，不过大家很快就适应了，气氛也再次变得融洽。在这些公鹿当中，斑比很欣赏罗奥，那是一只高大魁梧的公鹿，他还喜欢年轻帅气的卡鲁斯。这两只公鹿的角都已经脱落了，斑比经常盯着他们头上留下的两个灰色圆斑看，觉得他们特别高贵。那些圆斑光滑平整，和头上其他的斑点一样微微闪亮。

当有公鹿谈论起他时，聊天就会变得特别有趣。罗奥的左前腿有一块厚疤，那条腿也是瘸的，他老是问：“我走路的时候，你看得出来我是瘸子吗？”每当这个时候，大家都赶忙告诉他一点都看不出来，这也正是罗奥想听的话。事实上，确实不怎么看得出他腿有毛病。

“知道吗？”罗奥继续说，“我那次可是死里逃生呐。”接着他就会讲起那次如何从他手中逃脱的。罗奥说自己被他吓了一大跳，他不断向罗奥掷火球，幸运的是罗奥只是腿受伤，虽然他骨头都露出来了，疼得要死，但是他并没有惊慌失措，站起来就靠着三条腿奔跑。罗奥

看见他紧跟在后面，就一刻也不停歇地往前跑，一直跑到夜幕降临时才停下来休息。第二天一早，罗奥又继续跑，最后来到一个他认为安全的地方，才开始处理伤口。后来他就安静地躲在那里，等待伤口复原。最后他从那里出来，再次出现在大家面前，就成了一位英雄。虽然走路有点跛，但他以为谁也不会注意到这点。

现在，这几只鹿经常长时间地在一起聊天，讲述更多的故事。斑比听到了更多关于他的故事。他们告诉斑比他看起来很可怕，谁也不敢看他那苍白的脸，斑比根据自己的经验能够理解这点，但当他们谈论起他的味道时，斑比就觉得自己不够成熟，不应该参与大家的讨论。他们说他的味道千变万化，每次都不一样，但是很快就能闻出来，因为那股气味虽难以名状，但是特别浓烈、神秘、让人兴奋。

他们讲他如何靠两条腿走路，说他的两只手拥有神奇的力量。有的鹿并不明白“手”的概念。刚解释完什么是“手”，艾特拉就说：“我为什么不觉得这有什么神奇的，刚刚说的，松鼠也能做到啊，任何一只小老鼠都能做到。”她说完就轻蔑地转过头去。

“哦，不是的！”大家嚷道，告诉艾特拉那根本就是两件事情，但是年老的艾特拉可不会被他们吓住，她大声说：“那隼呢？还有秃鹰，猫头鹰什么的？他们也只有两条腿，想要抓什么东西时，只要一只腿站着，另一只腿去抓就行，这更难，他肯定做不到。”

我们年老的艾特拉可丝毫不愿意崇拜关于他的任何事情，她打心里讨厌他。“他可恶至极！”艾特拉坚持说。谁也没有反驳她，因为大家都讨厌他。

当大家说到他不止有两只手，还有第三只手时，谈话就变得让人有些费解了。

“这只是一个古老的传说。”年老的艾特拉直截了当地说，“我可不相信。”

“是吗？”罗奥反驳她，“那您倒是说说看，他是用什么打坏了我的腿呢？”

年老的艾特拉淡淡地说：“那就得问你自己了，他可没弄坏我的腿。”

埃娜阿姨说：“我也见过不少事情，我觉得说他有第三只手，这并不是空穴来风。”

“我同意，”年轻的卡鲁斯礼貌地说，“我有一个好朋友，是一只乌鸦……”说到这里他就停了下来，挨个扫视了一周，像是担心大家会笑话他和乌鸦做朋友，但是他看见大家都在认真听，就又继续说：“我必须承认，这只乌鸦消息很灵通，简直是个万事通。她告诉我他确实有第三只手，但不是一直都有。乌鸦说第三只手特别坏，并不像其他两只长在身上，而是被扛在肩上。乌鸦说她知道他和他的族人什么时候会变得危险。如果他没有带上第三只手，那他就不是危险的。”

年老的艾特拉听后哈哈大笑，她说：“我亲爱的卡鲁斯，你的乌鸦朋友是个笨蛋，你把我的话转告给她。她要是真像她自己说得那样聪明，就该知道他一直是危险的，永远是危险的。”但大家却持有不同的看法。

斑比的妈妈说：“也不能这么说，他们当中确实也有一些看起来不危险。”

“是吗？”艾特拉问鹿妈妈，“那你最好站着别动，等他们走过来祝福你过得开心。”

鹿妈妈温柔地说：“我当然不会站着不动，我要跑啊。”

费琳插嘴说：“你每次都得跑。”大家笑了。

他们继续谈论他的第三只手，大家开始变得严肃起来，说着说着，个个都心生恐惧。这些鹿并不能理解那到底是什么，但不管是一只手还是其他什么东西，都是足够恐怖的。他们大多也只是在故事里听说过，只有极少的鹿亲眼见过。他总是一动不动地站在远方，然后突然间响起一声惊雷，一团火焰随即喷射出来，即使离他很远的动物也会肚子开花，倒在地上死去。你根本不明白对方是怎么做到的，也不知道这一切是如何发生的。在讲这些的时候，大家都弯腰围坐在一起，似乎被一股黑暗阴郁的力量控制了。

这些血腥暴力的恐怖传说是祖祖辈辈流传下来的，有的甚至是编造的，但这些鹿满怀好奇，不知疲倦地听着一切关于他的故事，企图从每个故事中找到缓解内心恐惧和逃脱这股黑色力量的办法。

“根本不存在距离远近问题，”年轻的卡鲁斯说，“无论距离多远，他都能把你杀死。”

“你那只聪明的乌鸦难道没给你说过吗？”老艾特拉讥笑道。

“没有，”卡鲁斯笑了笑，“她说自己虽然经常见到他，但没人能够看透他。”

“是啊，只要他想，他也能把乌鸦赶出树林。”罗奥说。

“他还能把正在飞的山鸡打下来。”埃娜阿姨补充说。

斑比的妈妈说：“我奶奶告诉我，他还会把手往你身上扔。”

“是真的吗？”老艾特拉问道，“那怎么会弄出那么巨大的响声呢？”

“他把手从身上扯下来，然后火花四冒，甩出去就会有雷鸣般的响声。”鹿妈妈解释道，“他体内全是火。”

“听我说，”罗奥说，“他体内全是火，这点是真的，但是斑比妈妈说的这个手不太对。一只手不会弄出那么多伤口，你可以自己去瞧一瞧，他扔在我们身上的更像是牙齿，说牙齿的话更说得过去。大家伙都是被他的牙齿咬死的。”

“你们说，会不会有朝一日，他不再伤害我们？”年轻的卡鲁斯叹了口气。

这时，那只就要成熟的母鹿，年轻的玛丽娜开口了：“他们说有时他和我们一样温柔，说他会和我们住在一起，和我们一起玩，和我们成为朋友，整个森林都是祥和安乐的。”

老艾特拉哈哈大笑起来：“还是别让他来打扰我们，待在他自己的地方最好。”

埃娜阿姨不满地说：“您不该这么说。”

“为什么？”艾特拉说，“为什么不该这么说？和他做朋友？打我们能记事以来，就知道他一直在猎杀我们，他杀死了我们的父母和兄弟姐妹！因为他的存在，我们一出生就没有安宁过，只要被他看见，我们就得逃离追杀。现在竟然要让我和他做朋友，门儿都没有，真是毫无道理！”

玛丽娜睁着一双美丽又深邃的大眼睛，平静地看着大家说：“不是毫无道理的，只要有爱，一定会有这么一天的。”

年老的艾特拉转过身。“我要去找点吃的了。”说完就快步离开了。

第十章

冬季日子过得缓慢，偶尔天气会转暖，但紧接着又是一场雪，路上的积雪越来越厚，几乎无法清除。更糟糕的是雪开始融化了，在夜里融化的雪水冻结为冰，覆盖着地面，走在上面特别容易滑倒，尖锐的冰碴还经常把娇嫩的鹿蹄扎得鲜血直流。

几天前，大地降了一场大霜，空气比以前更加清冷稀薄，满世界都是寒风尖细的呼号。

树林里冷冷清清的，但是每天都有可怕的事情发生。有一次，野兔先生的小儿子病倒了，一群乌鸦趁机攻击，残忍地杀死了小兔。大家听见小野兔可怜地惨叫了好一阵子，但那时野兔先生不在家，后来他听到这个坏消息后，悲伤到了极点。

还有一次，松鼠被雪貂咬破了喉咙，但他奇迹般地逃脱了魔爪。他疼得说不出话来，大家都看见他在树杈间跳上跳下。他发疯一样地奔跑，不时停下来，坐在树干上，绝望地举起前爪，万分痛苦地抓自己的脑袋，鲜血就这么流到白色的胸口上。他跑了快一个小时，最后突然从树上掉下来，死在雪地里。几只喜鹊随即从树上飞下来，开始啄食他的尸体。

另有一天，一只狐狸把英俊且备受大家尊敬和爱戴的野鸡撕成了碎块。他的死引起了广泛的同情，动物们都尽力安慰他那悲痛欲绝的妻子。

野鸡当时藏在自己挖的雪洞里，他以为自己隐蔽得很好。可没想到自己会被狐狸拽了出去，之后惨死在狐狸爪下。谁也不会想到隐藏在雪洞里的野鸡会面临危险，可这一切就在光天化日下发生了。生存环境日益恶劣，野蛮和暴行随处可见，过去的美好记忆以及彼此间

的信任被摧毁了，昔日的所有美好传统也不复存在，这座森林再也没有了和平与怜悯。

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斑比的妈妈叹息道：“真是难以相信还会有好日子来临。”

埃娜阿姨也发出叹息，说：“很难相信，我们过去拥有那么美好的时光。”

“可是啊，”玛丽娜看着前方说，“我总是怀念过去的那些美好时光。”

“噢，”年老的艾特拉对埃娜阿姨说，“你的小孩怎么在发抖。”她指了一下戈博，说：“他经常这样吗？”

“是的，”埃娜阿姨不太开心，“他最近几天都这样。”

“好吧，”艾特拉直率地说道，“我没有孩子，这点真让我觉得轻省，要是这家伙是我的孩子，我就该担心他能不能熬过这个冬天喽！”

戈博的情况真的越来越糟。一直以来，他的体质就没有斑比和费琳好，个头也比他俩小。他很虚弱，情况一天不比一天，吃不下东西，哪怕就吃那么一点点，他的胃也会疼。寒冷和病痛将他折磨得不行，他抖得更加厉害，都快站不起来了。大家都用同情的眼光看他。

艾特拉走到戈博身前，和蔼地鼓励他道：“别难过。这可不是一个公鹿该有的样子，而且伤心对身体也不好。”说完，她急忙别过身，好让别人瞧不见她有多难受。

坐在雪地上的罗奥突然一跃而起，口中喃喃自语：“我不知道这是什么。”然后四处张望。

大家紧张看着他：“怎么了？”

“我不知道，”罗奥重复说，“但是我很不安，突然之间就感觉很不安，不知道哪里出问题了。”

卡鲁斯嗅了嗅空气，他说：“我没有发现奇怪的味道。”

大家安静站着，全都仔细聆听声音，认真嗅闻空气，一个个都说没什么异常，没有其他味道。

“不，”罗奥坚持说，“不管你们说什么，我就觉得不对劲。”

玛丽娜说：“乌鸦在叫。”

“他们又在叫了。”费琳急忙补充道，但是大家都听见了。

“他们飞起来了。”卡鲁斯和其他鹿同时说。

所有的鹿都抬起头看，一群乌鸦扇动翅膀飞过树梢，他们是从森林尽头飞过来的，那正是每次危险出现的方向。看来确实发生了不寻常的事情，大家一时间彼此埋怨起来。

“我说的没错吧？”罗奥问大家，“又要发生点什么了。”

“我们应该怎么办？”斑比的妈妈很焦急，小声地问大家。

“赶紧离开这里。”埃娜阿姨惊慌地说。

“等一下。”罗奥命令说。

“可是……孩子，”埃娜阿姨说，“我的孩子，戈博不能跑。”

“你走吧，”罗奥同意说，“你带着你的孩子先走。虽然我觉得没必要这样做，但是你要走，我也不会责备你。”罗奥的语气不仅严肃，还充满了警惕。

“快，戈博，费琳。安静点，慢慢走，要跟紧我。”埃娜阿姨提醒两个孩子，然后带着他们离开了。

时间一分一秒过去，大家站在那里，一动不动，边听边闻。

“难道我们受的苦还不够多吗？”年老的艾特拉开始说话了，“还得来这么一次……”她非常生气。斑比看着她，觉得艾特拉一定是想到了可怕的事情。

头顶上方，三四只喜鹊正喋喋不休地嚷嚷，要大家注意森林那头——乌鸦飞来那个方向，他们大声警告这些鹿：“小心！要小心啊！”大家看不到喜鹊，但能听见他们的呼喊和警告，有时是一只喜鹊在叫，有时是几只一起喊：“小心啊！大家小心啊！”喜鹊越来越近了，他们十分惊恐，从一棵树扑腾到另一棵树，时而警惕地回头望望，然后立马扇动翅膀往前飞。

“哇啊！”松鸦也大声发出警报。

突然之间，所有的鹿都被吓得蜷缩了身子，就像被电击了一样，谁都没动，只是嗅闻着空气的味道。

是他来了。

一股浓烈的味道飘过来，他们什么也做不了，气味钻进他们的鼻孔，他们的感觉麻木了，甚至连心跳都停止了。

空中，喜鹊还在报警，松鸦还在吱哇乱叫；地面上，鹿群周围所有的动物都活跃起来。山雀像一个浑身满是羽毛的小球，在树枝间穿来穿去，大叫着：“跑！快跑！”

燕八哥灵巧地从他们头顶飞过，空中只留下他们黑压压的掠影和拉长的叫声。透过乱蓬蓬、光秃秃的灌木丛，他们看见皑皑白雪上“嗖”地飘过一团小小的黑影，那是野鸡，然后是一团红影疾驰而过，那是狐狸。那股强烈的气味愈来愈浓，将恐惧的信号放射到每一个角落，可现在大家都顾不上害怕了，因为所有动物脑子里只有一个想法，那就是逃命！

整个森林里都充斥着那神秘的气味，它如此的强烈，大家便明白了，这一次来的不是一个他，一定还有其他帮手，看来一场无休止的杀戮近在眼前。

他们没有移动脚步，只是看着山雀突然拍打着翅膀呼啸而过，看着画眉鸟和松鼠在树梢间疯狂地乱窜。他们心里明白地面上的小动物没有什么可担心的，但他们也十分理解为何闻到这股味道后大家如此惊慌失措，因为森林里的任何一个生物都受不了他的现身。

野兔往前跳了一下，犹豫了一下，停下来，过了一会儿，又蹦了一下。

“前边怎么样啊？”卡鲁斯在后面焦急地问野兔。

但是野兔双眼迷离，一言不发，他被彻底吓蒙了。

“有什么好问的！”罗奥拉阴沉着脸回了一句。

野兔喘着气说：“我们被包围了！”他的话语显得毫无生气：“我们怎么都跑不了，到处都是他。”

这时，大家听见他的声音了，二三十个声音在叫：“哈！啊哈！”就像是狂风暴雨在怒吼，震得他们心惶惶。他把树枝像敲大鼓一样敲得叮当响，把树枝扯得哗哩哗啦，远处灌木丛里传来他开路的声音。

他来了。

他来到了密林深处。

一只野鸡从他的脚下飞起来。野鸡使劲扑腾翅膀，叫声就像短促的笛音。大家听着飞向空中的野鸡扇动翅膀的声音越来越弱。突然，空中炸开一声巨响，接着是一片死寂，然后是“砰”的一声，山鸡掉地上了。

“他死了。”斑比的妈妈颤抖着说。

“这是第一个。”罗奥补充说。

那只年轻的母鹿——玛丽娜说：“一会儿，我们当中一定有几个会死，也许我就是其中一个。”大家都万分惊恐，谁也没有听她说话。

斑比试着去思考，但是他那粗鲁的声音越来越大，大得麻痹了他的理智。除了这些噪音，斑比什么也听不见。这些声音使斑比感到浑身麻木。在一片大叫声、哭嚎声和碰撞声交织的世界里，斑比能听到自己的心在怦怦跳。他只感觉到好奇，甚至没有意识到自己四肢都在颤抖。鹿妈妈不时在斑比耳边小声说：“跟在我边上！”其实鹿妈妈每次都说得很大声，但在一片喧嚣声中，那声音在斑比听起来就像是低声耳语。这句“跟在我边上”着实鼓励了斑比，像一条链子一样把他拴在妈妈身旁。要是没有这句话，可能斑比早就傻乎乎乱跑出去了，但是正在快要撑不住、想跑出的那个瞬间，他听到了妈妈这句话。

他望向四周，到处都是慌里慌张四处逃窜的小动物。两只鼯鼠蛇行一般一闪而过，快得连眼睛都跟不上，野兔几近绝望，一只山鸡目瞪口呆地听着他的阵阵尖叫。

狐狸站在乱作一团的野鸡中间，野鸡没有注意到狐狸的存在，他们就在狐狸鼻子下面跑，狐狸也没有注意到野鸡的存在，他举步不

前，脑袋前伸，尖耳竖起，正聚精会神地听着周遭的喧声，嗅闻着周遭的空气，只有尾巴在轻轻晃动。

一只野鸡从最危险的地方急急忙忙跑过来，早已经是吓得魂飞魄散。

“不能飞！”他向其他同伴大喊，“不要飞，只能跑！不要慌张！别飞啊！只能跑！跑！跑！”

他一遍一遍重复喊，就像是为了鼓励自己一样，但是他都不知道自己喊了些什么。

“吼！吼！哈！哈！”传来一阵可怕的叫声，显然，他就在附近了。

“不要慌张。”那只野鸡正尖声喊，声音突然变成尖细的啼叫，然后张开翅膀“呼呼”地飞上了天。斑比一直注视着野鸡，看着他从两棵树之间往上直飞，身上棕绿色和深金属蓝的斑纹像金子一样闪着光，后面长长的尾羽骄傲地扫过。突然响起一声雷鸣般的巨响，空中的野鸡猛地一抽搐，便头朝地往下坠，看起来就像是他想用嘴去啄自己的爪子，然后重重摔在地上。他倒在地上的伙伴中间，一动不动了。

这下，大家都失去理智了，一个个全都跑开了，五六只野鸡同时扑打翅膀“呼呼”飞起来，剩下的野鸡边跑边喊：“不要飞啊！”又是五六声炸雷般的响声，几只野鸡倒地而亡。

“过来。”斑比的妈妈说。斑比看了看周围，罗奥和卡鲁斯已经逃走了，年老的艾特拉也不见了，他们身边只剩玛丽娜了。斑比跟住妈妈，玛丽娜胆怯地跟在后面。四面八方全是咆哮声、叫喊声和雷鸣般的轰鸣声。鹿妈妈很冷静，虽然她也在隐隐发抖，但是她头脑很清醒。

“斑比，我的孩子，”她说，“要一直跟着我，我们得从这里出去，

穿过那片空地，但是现在我们必须慢慢走。”

喧闹声还在沸腾。当他把它从手里甩出去，就会爆发出雷鸣巨响，已经听到十多声了。

“小心，”鹿妈妈说，“现在不要跑，但等会儿穿过空地时一定要跑，能跑多快就跑多快。还有，别忘了，斑比，我的宝贝，等到了空地千万别管我，即使我倒下了也不要管我，你要一直往前跑。斑比，听明白了吗？”

嘈杂声从四面涌来，但鹿妈妈却平静地一步步往前走。雪地里，一群野鸡埋头于前后奔跑，他们突然停下来，然后又开始左冲右突；野兔一家来回蹦跳，一会儿蹲下，一会儿又蹦起来。谁也没有说话，大家都被恐惧攫住了，都被周围的喧嚣和雷声震蒙了。

斑比和鹿妈妈走着走着，眼前变得明亮起来，透过灌木丛可以看见空地就在前面。在他们身后，那敲打树干发出的声音越来越近了，越来越近的还有折断的树枝噼啪响，还有那“吼！吼！哈！哈！”的咆哮声。

野兔先生和他几个亲戚从斑比他们身边跑过，向空地冲去。“砰！砰！嘭！嘭！”几声响，斑比看见其中一只兔子半路撞向接骨木，翻身倒地，露出白白的肚子，抽搐了几下就不动了。斑比吓得呆住了，这时候，他还听见身后传来叫喊声：“他们来了，快跑啊！”

突然响起一阵用力拍动翅膀的声音，紧接着是喘息声、抽泣声、张开翅膀的声音以及翅膀拍打声。原来是野鸡飞了起来，然后所有能飞的动物一下全都飞起来。“砰！砰！”声重复了几下后，只听见被击落的动物掉在地上发出的沉闷声响，以及幸运逃过此劫的动物发出的刺耳尖叫声。

斑比听见背后一阵脚步声，回头一看。他就在那里。他们从灌木

丛中鱼贯而出，站在这边，也站在那边。他们从各处涌出来，扒开灌木丛，砍掉周围的树枝，一边打鼓一样敲打树干，一边发出恶魔般的吼叫。

“现在，”鹿妈妈说，“我们要离开这里，记住，不要离我太近。”说完她向前一跃，几乎是从雪上飞掠而过，斑比也跟着冲了出去。雷鸣般的响声从四面八方向他们袭来，仿佛地面都要被震裂为两半。斑比什么也没有看见，他一直往前跑，越来越渴望逃离身后的嘈杂，逃到这股气味无法到达的地方。内心燃起的逃跑冲动、强烈的求生欲望终于在他身上爆发了。他往前跑，好像看见自己的妈妈倒下了，但又不能确定是不是她。身后源源不断的惊雷声让他心生惧惮，他感觉眼前变得朦胧起来。最后，他完全被恐惧控制住了，什么也思考不了，什么也看不见，只是一直往前跑。

斑比跑过空地，又跑过一个灌木丛，身后仍然还有吼叫声和哭喊声，依然能听见尖厉的雷鸣声，而头顶的树枝则响起“噼里啪啦”的声音，就像第一次下冰雹时那样。这些声音慢慢远去了，斑比还在往前跑。

雪地里躺着一只垂死的野鸡，他的脖子已经被拧坏了，正无力地拍打着翅膀，听见斑比脚步声，野鸡以为是他走过来了，于是停止了无用的挣扎，低声叹道：“我完蛋了！”斑比没理会野鸡，继续往前跑。

他跌跌撞撞地闯进一个灌木丛，由于里面的灌木密布丛生，斑比不得不放慢脚步来寻找小径。正当他用两腿极不耐烦地扒开灌木丛时，听见一个气喘吁吁的声音在喊：“这里！”斑比下意识地循着声音走过去，立马就发现了一块空地。斑比看见眼前一个动物正虚弱地挪动身子。原来刚刚是野兔的妻子在说话。

“你能帮我一下吗？”她说。雪地上，野兔妻子两条后腿无力地晃

动着，温热的鲜血不断往外渗，染红了雪地，也融化了雪，斑比看得直哆嗦。她不停地重复：“你能帮我一下吗？”听她说这话，你似乎感觉她好像很健康，甚至是快乐的。“我不知道自己怎么了，”她继续说，“我都没感觉发生了什么，但我好像不能走路了……”

她话还没有说完，便倒下不动了。斑比再次被恐惧控制，继续往前跑。

“斑比！”

听到有一只鹿在叫他，斑比吃惊地停下脚步，然后又听见了那个声音：“斑比，是你吗？”

是戈博的声音。斑比看见戈博半躺在雪地里，无助地挣扎着，他没有力气，也站不起来，只能微微抬起头。斑比急忙跑过去。

“戈博，你妈妈呢？”斑比上气不接下气地问，“费琳呢？”他说得又快又急，恐惧再次占据了她的整颗心。

“妈妈和费琳不得不丢下我。”戈博老实回答，他说得很轻，但语气和成年的鹿一样严肃，“我跌倒了，他们必须往前跑。斑比，你也必须继续跑。”

“站起来，”斑比哭着说，“戈博，你快站起来，你已经休息这么久了，现在一秒也不能耽搁，快起来和我一起走。”

“不，不要管我，”戈博平静地说，“我不能站起来了，不可能了。我也很想站起来，但是我太虚弱了。”

“那你怎么办？”斑比坚持说。

“那就知道了，可能会死吧。”戈博坦白说。

这时，喧闹声再度袭来，回声四起，那“砰砰”的雷声又传过来

了。斑比缩成一团。突然，一根树枝被折断，年轻的卡鲁斯从雪地上疾驰而过。

“快跑，”他看见斑比时大声喊，“你要是能跑的话，就别站着不动！”卡鲁斯说完溜烟就不见了，这旋风般的奔跑把斑比也带动了。斑比都没意识到自己又开始跑了，跑了一会儿才说了一句“戈博，保重”。但是他已经跑出去好远了，戈博不可能听见这句话。

森林里一直回荡着吼叫声和巨响，斑比一直跑到日暮降临。天慢慢黑了，森林也慢慢安静下来。很快，一缕清风就吹散了他那无处不在的气味，但是那股躁动依旧存在。

斑比遇见的第一只鹿是罗奥，他走起路来跛得更厉害了。

“一只狐狸躺在橡树那里，伤口那儿发着高烧。”罗奥说，“我刚从他身边走过，他太痛苦了，不停地在那里啃雪、啃地。”

“你看见我妈妈了吗？”斑比问。

“没有……”罗奥吞吞吐吐地回答，然后很快就走开了。

后来，夜里的时候，斑比遇见了老艾特拉和费琳，大家见了面都十分高兴。

“你们有没有看见我的妈妈？”斑比问她们。

“没有啊，”费琳说，“我连自己的妈妈在哪里都不知道。”

“哎呀，”年老的艾特拉爽朗地说道，“这下可好了！我本来没有孩子可操心，轻松自在的，现在却要一下子照看两个孩子，我真是得感谢老天啊！”

斑比和费琳都笑了。

他们聊到戈博，斑比把自己知道的一切告诉她们，大家十分伤心，开始哭了起来。但是艾特拉不让他们继续哭，她说：“先不管其他，你们首先需要去找点东西吃。你们一整天都没吃东西了，现在还在这里哭，我可没有听说过这种事情。”

她把两个孩子带到一个地方，那里还有一些叶子没有彻底枯萎。年老的艾特拉特别温柔，她让斑比和费琳痛快儿地吃，自己却一片叶子也不吃。看见哪儿有草，她就扒开上面的雪，对他俩说：“过这儿来吃，这儿的草好着呢。”或者说：“不着急，我们一会儿还会找着更好的。”不过，间或她也会抱怨：“看孩子的麻烦事儿真是够荒谬的！”

突然，埃娜阿姨出现了，大家看见后急忙跑了过去。斑比是第一个看见她的，他叫道：“埃娜阿姨。”费琳喜出望外地扑了过去，大声喊：“妈妈！”但是埃娜阿姨看起来精疲力竭，在一旁呜咽不止。

“戈博没了，”她流着泪说，“我去找过他，我回到他跌倒的那片雪地，当时他就躺在那里，可那里什么都没有……他死了……我可怜的小戈博……”

年老的艾特拉在一旁急嚷道：“哭什么哭，你应该先找找看附近有没有他的脚印，到那时再哭也不晚。”

“根本就没有戈博的脚印，”埃娜阿姨说，“但是……有他的脚印。一定是他发现了戈博。”

埃娜阿姨不再说话了。过了一会儿，斑比沮丧地问她：“埃娜阿姨，你看见过我的妈妈吗？”

“没有。”埃娜阿姨轻声回答他。

从那以后，斑比再也没有看见过自己的妈妈。

第十一章

终于，柳树开始飘絮了，世界正悄然变绿，不过树枝上和灌木丛上的幼嫩叶子还是小小的，在清晨柔和的阳光中，它们看起来是那么有朝气，就像刚睡醒的小宝宝一样。

斑比站在一棵榛树前，不断用新长出的鹿角撞击树干。斑比觉得这样十分舒服，并且这也是很有必要的，因为鹿角外面有一层皮包裹，只有等那层皮脱落后，高贵的鹿角才会显现出来，除非是傻瓜，否则可没有哪只鹿愿意等着它自动脱落。斑比不断顶撞树干，直到那层皮裂开，一块块破裂的皮肤从耳朵上掉下来。当他撞击榛树树干时，他感觉自己的鹿角比树干坚硬多了，一股自豪感和力量感便油然而生，于是他更加用力地撞，直到树皮被撞破，直到长条状的树皮脱落，直到白色的树干裸露出来，在空气中迅速变为铁红色。可斑比并没有停下来，他每撞榛树一次，就能看见白色的树干摇晃一次，这让他更加兴奋。那一整排的榛树都留下了他撞击的痕迹。

“哇！你现在完全成熟了。”附近响起一个愉快的声音。

斑比抬头看去，一只松鼠正友好地看着自己。这时，头顶又传来一声短促尖锐的笑声：“啊！哈哈！”

斑比和松鼠都被吓得不轻。原来橡树上有只啄木鸟。高处的啄木鸟对着他俩说：“对不起，但是每次我看见鹿这样，我就忍不住想笑。”

“有什么好笑的吗？”斑比礼貌地问。

“唉！”啄木鸟说，“你们鹿就是这样固执，这样明明是错误的。首先，你应该找一棵大树嘛，你从这种小榛树的树干上是什么也捞不着

的。”

“我应该从它们身上得到什么呢？”斑比问。

“虫子，”啄木鸟笑呵呵地说，“幼虫，昆虫啊。看，像这样！”他开始敲打橡树的树干，笃！笃！笃！

松鼠跑到啄木鸟面前骂他：“你胡说什么呢？这只鹿可不是为了找昆虫和幼虫的。”

“为什么不呢？”啄木鸟开心地反问松鼠，“虫子是很好吃的啊！”说完他啄出半条虫子，一口就吞进肚子里了，然后又开始东敲西啄。

“你不懂的。”松鼠继续没好气地说，“像鹿这样高贵的动物有更加远大的追求，你这样说只能说明你见识短浅。”

“对我来说都一样，”啄木鸟回答，“那种高追求，我可没兴趣。”他高兴地说完就拍着翅膀飞走了。松鼠又从树上下来。

“难道你不记得我了吗？”松鼠愉快地问。

“当然记得，”斑比十分友好地回答，“你是不是住在那里？”他指着那棵橡树问。

松鼠乐呵呵看着斑比。

“你把我和我奶奶搞混了。”他说，“我知道你是把我当成我奶奶了，她以前住在那里，那会儿你还是个孩子。斑比王子，奶奶经常给我说你的故事。不久前她被雪貂害死了，就是上个冬天，你可能还记得。”

“是的，”斑比点头，“我听说了这件事。”

“嗯，后来，我爸爸就住在那里了。”松鼠继续说，他挺直腰身坐着，两只爪子优雅地搭在白色胸脯上，“但是你可能把我和我爸也搞混了，你认识我的爸爸吗？”

“很遗憾，”斑比回答，“我没有见过他。”

“我也这么想，”松鼠满意地大声说，“我的爸爸性格比较乖戾，不怎么说话，他不和任何动物来往。”

“那他现在在哪里呢？”斑比问。

“这个，”松鼠说，“上个月，猫头鹰抓走了他。嗯……现在我自己住在上面，我很知足，因为我就是在这里出生的。”

斑比转身要离开。

“等一下，”松鼠见状急忙大喊，“我没有想过要和你说这些的，我本来想说另外一件事。”

斑比停下来，耐心地问：“什么事？”

“这个……”松鼠说。他心想：“我要说什么来着？”他想了一会儿，突然跳起来，然后立马直起身，稳稳地靠在漂亮的尾巴上看着斑比。“我想到了，”松鼠说，“现在我知道我要对你说什么了。我想说你的鹿角现在长得差不多了，你一定会成为一个特别英俊的鹿王。”

“你真的这么想吗？”斑比开心地问。

“一定会特别英俊，”松鼠一边激动地按着白色的胸脯，一边说，“你的鹿角这么高大、威武，还有这么修长、明亮的角尖。这样的鹿角很少见！”

“真的吗？”斑比问，他听了松鼠的话特别高兴，又开始用角去撞榛树树干，扯下来一长块树皮。

这期间，松鼠就没停止说话：“我必须承认，同龄的鹿很少有像你这样的鹿角。太不可思议了！去年夏天我在远处看见过你几次，那时候你还很瘦小，我真不敢相信站在我面前的是同一只鹿。”

斑比突然安静下来。“再见！”他匆匆说，“我得走了。”说完就跑远了。

斑比不愿别人提及上个夏天，因为自从那个夏天开始，他就过得很痛苦。最开始，因为妈妈的失踪，他感到异常迷茫，整个冬季漫无止境，虽然春天脚步姗姗，最终还是露脸了，但是等树叶变绿还得好长一段时间。要不是年老的艾特拉，他可能都撑不过那个冬天。幸好艾特拉尽全力帮助他，照看他，只不过大多数时候他都是单独待着。

他总是想起戈博，可怜的戈博，他和其他动物一起死去了。这个冬天，斑比经常想到戈博，他头一次欣赏起戈博来，觉得他是那么可爱，那么善良。

他很少见到费琳了，因为费琳很多时候都和她的妈妈在一起，而且她好像变得越来越害羞了。慢慢地，天气终于转暖，斑比才在身上开始发现自己过去的影子。他高高的头上第一次长出了鹿角，他很自豪，但是失望也随之而来。

其他公鹿一看见斑比，就会跑过来追赶他，还会恶狠狠地撵他，不让他靠近，直到最后，斑比因为害怕被捉住，一步也不敢往前跨。无论在哪里，斑比都怕自己被别的公鹿看见，总是走那些很隐蔽的小径，他的心里十分不痛快。

随着天气一天天暖和起来，斑比越发感到不安，他明显感觉心里有一种既愉快又痛苦的渴望在涌动。无论什么时候，斑比只要看到费琳或者她的某个雌性朋友，即使相距很远，他都会产生一种不可思议的兴奋感觉。这种情况发生得太频繁了，慢慢地，斑比能认出费琳的踪迹，嗅到空气中她的气息。他发现自己不由自主地被她吸引了，但

每次他都很失落，因为每次当他向费琳她们追过去，只会有两种结果：要么是他找不到她们，转悠一圈只好承认她们在躲着他；要么就是突然闯出一头公鹿，对他又踢又顶，用尽不光彩的方式赶走他。这其中罗奥和卡鲁斯欺负他最厉害。唉！这真是段不快乐的日子！

而现在松鼠竟让斑比想起那一切，真是愚蠢的做法。斑比听后暴躁起来，开始一路狂奔。在他经过的灌木丛里，山雀和篱雀全都吓得飞起来，七嘴八舌激动地问：“怎么了？”斑比没有回话。几只喜鹊紧张地问：“发生什么了？”松鸦生气地大叫：“你怎么回事？”斑比没有理会。头顶的金雀鸟在一棵棵树上不停地叫唤：“早上好！我真开——心！”斑比也没有回应。阳光照进来，照得灌木丛明朗透亮，生机勃勃，但斑比并没有停下来注意这些。

突然响起一阵翅膀扑腾的声音，从斑比脚边飞出去一个五彩缤纷的东西，那夺目的色彩就在他眼边闪耀。斑比停下来，呆住了！飞着的是野鸡——杰勒罗，斑比差点就踩着他，所以杰勒罗惊慌地飞了出来。

杰勒罗逃到一边，扯着难听的嗓子噼里啪啦骂开了：“我从来没遇见过这种事，太可恶了！”斑比十分错愕地站在原地，目不转睛地看着野鸡。

“还好，这次没事，但是你做得太不对了。”地面一个温柔的声音喃喃说着。她是杰勒娜，野鸡的妻子，她正坐在地上孵蛋。“我的丈夫被你吓坏了，”她又换用生气的口吻说，“我也是，但是我可不敢从这个地方离开，不管发生什么我都会坚守在这里。哪怕你踏在我身上，我也不会动。”

斑比有一点尴尬。“对不起啊，”他结结巴巴地说，“我不是故意的。”

“嗨，没关系。”野鸡的妻子说，“毕竟也没有发生不好的事。只是

我和我的丈夫现在都很紧张。你能理解为什么……”

斑比一点都不明白她讲的是什麼，他继续往前走，只是现在安静了下来。森林里一片欢歌笑语，这时的阳光更加温暖，更加灿烂。灌木丛中的树叶、脚下的草地、湿润的土壤，一切闻起来都是那么清香。斑比浑身充满了年轻的朝气，四肢注入了无穷的力量，但碍于不能像刚才一样动作太大，他只能收起步子笨拙地向前走，看起来就像一个机器人迈着生硬的步伐一样。

斑比走到一棵低矮的桤木前，高高地抬起腿，然后使劲踢脚下的泥土，搞得土壤四处飞溅，他还用尖锐的蹄子切断长在地上的青草，刨开野豌豆、韭葱、莳菜和琼花，直到眼前露出伤痕累累的土壤。他每踢一下，地面都会发出沉闷的声音。

在一棵年久的无花果树下，两只鼯鼠正在树根交错盘绕的地方刨土，他们看见斑比的举动后，为他感到着急。

“他那样子可真是愚蠢，”其中一只鼯鼠对另一只说，“你看见过有这样子刨土的吗？”

另外一只鼯鼠拉下嘴角，露出不屑的神情。“你看得出这一点，这家伙什么都不懂。”他说，“不过这就是人们明明不懂某些事，还硬要去做的样子。”

斑比突然停下来，听着周围的声响，他抬起头又听了一遍。透过树叶的缝隙，他看见树枝间有红色斑点在晃动，还有隐约可见的鹿角。斑比倒吸一口气。不管是谁在那边，是卡鲁斯也好，是其他鹿也好，是谁都不重要了。“冲过去！”斑比心里想，“我要告诉他们我已经不再害怕他们了。”他想着想着，突然很自豪地说：“我要用行动说明，让他们最好给我小心点！”

斑比猛地冲出去，灌木丛沙沙作响，枝条被折断了不少。一只公

鹿就在眼前了，他并没看见他，因为一切太快了，简直是一闪而过。他脑子里只有一个念头：“冲过去！”他做好了搏斗的准备，他低下鹿角，把所有力量聚集在肩部，然后冲了出去。斑比已经闻到了对手身上的味道，他眼里只有对手的红色侧腹，就在他以为要撞到对方的时候，谁知对方轻轻一闪，斑比扑了个空，差点栽倒在地。他摇晃了一下，然后重新站稳，准备再次发起猛攻。

这下，斑比认出了那只公鹿，那是老鹿王。

斑比吃惊不已，一下惶恐起来。他想转身就走，但又觉得逃跑是一种耻辱，只好呆呆站在那里，只是待在这里也够让他难为情的。

“怎么了？”老鹿王平静而温柔地问。他的声音很直率，但又充满了威严，穿透了斑比整颗心。斑比安静地站着。

“怎么了？”老鹿王又问了一遍。

“我以为……”斑比结结巴巴地说，“我以为……是罗奥……或者……”他停下来，鼓起勇气瞟了一眼老鹿王，可这一眼更让斑比觉得疑惑。老鹿王威武地站在那里，一动不动，他头上的毛发全都变白了，深陷的眼眶里，一双黑眸闪着骄傲的光芒。

“怎么不攻击我了？”老鹿王问。

斑比抬起头，内心感到一阵狂喜，同时，他又感觉到一种莫名其妙的恐惧，不由地吓得直哆嗦。他想大声说：“因为我爱您。”但说出口的却是：“我不知道……”

老鹿王看着他。“很久没有看见你了，”他说，“你已经长得这么高大、强壮了。”

斑比没有说话，老鹿王的话让他高兴得发抖。老鹿王继续用审视的眼光看他，突然就走到斑比面前，可把斑比吓坏了。

“勇敢点。”老鹿王说。

老鹿王转过身，下一秒就消失了，只剩斑比久久地愣在原地。

第十二章

现在已经是夏天了，天气很炎热。斑比之前感觉到的渴望又在体内骚动，并且比之前更加强烈，就在斑比的血液里涌动，让他得不到片刻安宁，所以他只好在野外游荡，走得远远的。

有一天，他遇见了费琳，这真是一件意外的事情。当时斑比正受那不安分的渴望折磨，思绪不宁，感觉也很迟钝，甚至都没有认出费琳来。当时他看着站在面前的费琳，好长一段时间都说不出话来。后来，他说话了，就像着迷了一样，他说：“费琳，你长得好漂亮！”

“你终于认出我来了！”费琳说。

“我怎么会认不出你？”斑比大声说，“难道我们不是一起长大的吗？”

费琳叹了口气：“我们太久没有见面了。”接着她又说道：“大家都变陌生了。”不过说这一句的时候，费琳又恢复了她之前说话的语气，很欢快，像开玩笑一样。

他们并肩而行，过了一会儿，斑比说：“小时候，我经常和妈妈在这条路上走。”

“这条路通向草地。”费琳说。

“我第一次见到你就是在草地上，”斑比带点严肃地说，“你还记得吗？”

“记得，”费琳回答，“有戈博，还有我。”她叹了一口气，轻声说：“可怜的戈博……”

斑比重复她的话：“可怜的戈博。”

然后他们开始回忆过去，一直重复问对方“你还记得吗？”然后发现每一件小事对方都记得，这让他俩开心极了。

“你还记得我们以前总是在草地上追着玩吗？”斑比追忆说。

“嗯，记得。就像这样。”费琳说完像箭一样跑了出去。斑比开始愣了一下，有点摸不着头脑，随即追了上去。“等等我！等等我！”他高兴地对费琳喊。

“不等你了，”费琳逗弄他说，“我等不及了。”她轻盈地往前跳，在草地和灌木丛之上跃出漂亮的弧线。最后斑比追上费琳并挡住她，他俩才重新并肩走，安安静静的，两人都满足地笑了。突然费琳向空中一跃，像是被什么咬了一口，然后就往前冲了出去。斑比跟着费琳跑，但是费琳四处乱转，试图躲开斑比。

“等一下，”斑比喘着粗气说，“我想问你点事情。”

费琳这才停下来。

“你想问什么？”她问他，心里很好奇。

斑比沉默了。

“哦，原来你骗我！”费琳说完就准备要走。

“不是的，”斑比急忙说，“等一下，等一下，我想……我想问你……费琳，你爱我吗？……”

费琳望着斑比，比刚才更加好奇了，而且还有点谨慎，她说：“我不知道。”

“你一定知道的，”斑比继续说，“我清楚地知道，费琳，我爱你，

很爱你。告诉我，你爱不爱我？”

“也许，我是爱你的。”费琳羞怯地说。

“那你愿意和我在一起吗？”斑比热情地问她。

“除非你好好求我。”费琳开心地说。

“答应我，费琳，我亲爱的，美丽的费琳。”斑比深情地大喊，“你听见了吗？我真心想和你在一起。”

“嗯，我会和你在一起。”费琳温柔地说，说完就跑开了。

斑比欣喜若狂，赶紧追上去。费琳径直穿过草地，突然转了个方向，消失在灌木丛里。斑比正要转方向跟上费琳，灌木丛里猛地传来一阵声响，卡鲁斯从中跳了出来。

“给我停住！”卡鲁斯大声叫。

斑比没理他，他心里只想追上费琳。“让我过去，”他慌忙说，“我没时间跟你争吵。”

“滚出去，”卡鲁斯生气地命令斑比，“马上从这里离开，否则我会打得你不留一口气。我不准你跟着费琳。”

斑比时常痛苦地想起上个夏天的遭遇，现在这份记忆又被卡鲁斯唤醒了。他突然愤怒了，什么也没说，低下鹿角直接顶向卡鲁斯。

斑比的进攻令卡鲁斯无法抵抗，他还没有反应过来发生了什么，就已经躺在草地上。虽然他起身的速度比闪电还快，但还没等他站起来，斑比又发起进攻，把他撞得直晃悠。

“斑比，”他大声叫起来，“斑……”他还想再喊一声，但是没等他喊完，斑比第三次冲过来，从他肩膀擦过去。卡鲁斯疼得差点晕了过

去。

看着斑比又要冲向自己，卡鲁斯赶紧闪躲到一边。他突然发现自己明显败下阵来了，同时意识到这是一场生死较量，他被一股可怕的恐惧攫住了。他知道斑比很生气，说不定会毫不留情地杀死他。想到这里，卡鲁斯吓得失去了理智，转头就想跑，想逃脱斑比的追杀。他从那条路上逃走，最后冲进了灌木丛，他唯一的希望就是逃跑。

斑比突然停止了追赶，但害怕的卡鲁斯没注意到这点，他一直在灌木丛中穿梭，尽可能快地跑。斑比停下来了，因为他听见费琳在尖叫，那叫声充满了痛苦和绝望。斑比立即转身冲了回去。

当他到达草地时，他看见罗奥正在追费琳，这时费琳跑进了灌木丛。

“罗奥！”斑比大叫一声，甚至都没意识到自己喊出了口。

罗奥因为腿有点瘸，跑得不是很快，他听见斑比的叫声后就停了下来。

“哦，是我们的小斑比啊！”他轻蔑地说，“你叫我是有什么事吗？”

“对，”斑比强忍怒火，尽量平静地说，“我希望你不要打扰费琳，马上离开这里。”

“你把我叫住，就是为了这件事吗？”罗奥讥笑道，“啊哟，你怎么变成了这么一个粗野无礼的小子，我可没觉得我可能会答应你。”

“罗奥，”斑比的语气依旧平和，“我是为你好。你现在不走，一会儿就该希望我能放你走了，但到那时候，你可别想有逃跑的机会。”

“是吗？”罗奥气冲冲地说，“你小子竟敢这么跟我说话！因为我是

瘸子吗？我猜是这样。要知道很多人都看不出来。你打跑了卡鲁斯，难道认为我也怕了你不成？卡鲁斯就是一个胆小鬼。我警告你……”

“不，等一下，罗奥，”斑比打断他，“还是让我来提醒你，马上离开这里！”他的声音有些颤抖，“罗奥，我一直很喜欢你，我一直认为你很聪明，而且敬你为长者。我说最后一次，赶紧离开！我已经没有耐心了。”

“真是遗憾，你就这么点耐心，”罗奥语带嘲讽地说，“我说小子，这可真是遗憾。但是别着急，我很快就能收拾你，你不用等太久，可能你都忘了我过去是怎样经常收拾你的了。”

一想到那些遭遇，斑比再也控制不住，二话不说就冲了出去。罗奥也低头迎战。斑比像一只野兽一样撕咬罗奥，两对鹿角“哐当”抵在一起。罗奥稳稳站住，但心里暗暗吃惊，因为斑比没有退缩的迹象。罗奥万万没想到斑比会先发起进攻，突如其来的攻击让他不知所措。他感到斑比力量强大，心里不安起来，意识到自己绝对不能掉以轻心。

两个脑袋正死命互抵，罗奥玩起了阴谋，他突然往后一退，斑比立刻失去平衡，向前扑去。

斑比后腿撑住身体，不等自己重新站稳，又拼命向对方扑去。“咔嗒！”罗奥鹿角上一只角杈被撞掉了。罗奥心想自己额头一定被撞得稀烂了。他痛得眼冒金星，耳朵嗡嗡响。紧接着，罗奥肩膀又受到一次撞击，他跌倒在地上，几乎不能呼吸了，而一旁的斑比正恶狠狠地看着他。

“放我走吧。”罗奥呻吟着。

斑比疯狂地袭击他，目光凶狠，似乎没有想过手下留情。

“求求你停下来！”罗奥哀求着，“你难道不知道我是个瘸子吗？我

刚才是和你闹着玩的。放过我吧，难道我就不能和你开个玩笑吗？”

斑比没说一个字，他放开了罗奥。罗奥疲惫地站起来，满身是血，歪歪扭扭地离开了。

斑比正要去灌木丛里找费琳，费琳却自己走了出来。她刚刚就站在树林边上，目睹了整个过程。

“你太棒了！”她笑着说。过了一会儿，她郑重又温柔地对斑比说：“我爱你。”

然后，他俩一起幸福地往前走。

第十三章

这一天，斑比和费琳一起出去，他俩要去找当初斑比遇见老鹿王的那块小空地。一路上，斑比很兴奋，把自己和老鹿王的事情都告诉了费琳。

“可能我们还会再遇见他，”他说，“我想让你见见他。”

“很好啊，”费琳大胆地说，“我也想单独和他聊会儿天。”不过，费琳并没有说真话，虽然她对老鹿王很好奇，但是她心里其实很害怕。

天空已变成朦胧的灰色了，太阳马上就要下山了。

他们肩并肩，静静地往前走，灌木丛上的树叶随之摇摇晃晃，他们可以清楚看到周围的情况。不一会儿，附近传来一阵声响，他俩停下来循声望过去。这时，威武的老鹿王穿过灌木丛，缓慢地走进了空地。在灰蒙蒙的暮色里，他的身体看起来就像一个偌大的灰色影子。

费琳不自主地尖叫了一声。斑比也很害怕，但他控制住了自己，没让卡在喉咙里的尖叫声发出来。可费琳叫得实在太绝望，斑比听了后顿生怜悯，很想安慰她。

“怎么了？”他关切地小声问，不过声音是颤抖的，“怎么了，费琳？他不会伤害我们的。”

费琳什么也没说，又尖叫了一声。

“亲爱的，不要这么担忧，”斑比恳求，“被他吓成这样，别人会笑话你的。他毕竟是我们家族中的一员。”

但是费琳仍然很惊慌，她完全呆住了，直盯着置若罔闻的老鹿王，不停地尖叫。

“冷静点！”斑比恳求她，“你这样，他会怎么想我们呢？”

可是费琳安静不下来。“我不管他怎么想，”她说又尖叫起来，“啊——哦！呦！……他太高大了！”

老鹿王站在空地上，在草地上寻找美食。

斑比一只眼看着歇斯底里的费琳，一只眼睛看着平静的老鹿王。他对费琳的鼓励也让他战胜了自己的恐惧，他重新鼓起勇气，开始责备自己每次看见老鹿王都是这种状态——混杂着恐惧、兴奋、钦佩和顺从的情感。

“真是愚蠢极了，”他说着在心里做了一个痛苦的决定，“我要走过去告诉他我是谁。”

“不要，”费琳大声叫，“不要！呦——会发生可怕的事情的。啊——哦！”

“我过去了。”斑比说。

老鹿王在那边吃着草，根本没把抽泣的费琳放在眼里，看起来傲慢无比。斑比觉得自己被侮辱和冒犯了。“我去了，”他说，“安静点！你看着，什么也不会发生的，在这里等着我。”

他走了过去，但是费琳没有在原地等。她根本不想留在这里，也没有任何勇气留在这里。她觉得自己最好是离开这里，于是转身就跑了。斑比听见她越走越远，边走边尖叫：“呦！呦！”

斑比本来也想和她一起走，但是现在已经不可能了，他振作起来，向前走去。

透过树枝的缝隙，斑比看见老鹿王站在空地上，头靠近地面吃着草。在当他踏出灌木丛的一瞬，斑比觉得自己的心脏都要飞出去了。

老鹿王立刻抬头盯着他，然后目光越过斑比凝视远处，好像斑比不存在一样。在斑比看来，这两个举动都太傲慢了。

斑比不知道该怎么办，他来是想和老鹿王问好，他想说：“您好，我叫斑比。请问您的大名？”

就这么简单的几句话，此刻要斑比说出口，这可是一件困难的事。现在最好应该做什么呢？斑比不能一句话不说就走，那样会让老鹿王觉得自己没有教养，斑比不想这样，一旦开口说话就还要走过去，可是斑比也不想往前走了。

老鹿王如此高大、威严，这让斑比感到既谦卑又欣喜。他尝试鼓起勇气，但是失败了，他不断鼓励自己：“为什么要害怕他呢？难道我不是和他一样高大威猛吗？”但这还是不奏效。斑比依旧感觉害怕，并且在内心深处觉得自己真的不如老鹿王，觉得自己差太远了。他很受挫，用尽了全身力气才保持表面的镇定。

而老鹿王看着斑比，心里想：“真是一只英俊潇洒的鹿！这样有风度，有魅力！看起来这么高贵。可我不该盯着他，真不该盯着他，而且说不定还会让他感到尴尬。”所以他将目光从斑比身上移开，又望向空荡荡的远方。

“真傲慢的眼神！”斑比心里想，“这让我真是无法忍受。”

老鹿王心里想：“我想和这个英俊的小子说话。永远不和陌生人说话是多么愚蠢的事情啊。”他看着前方，心里默默思考。

“可能对他来说，我就是空气。”斑比自言自语，“他那副样子，就像是世界上唯一的生物一样。”

“我应该对他说点什么呢？”老鹿王寻思着，“我很少说话，万一说出一些愚蠢的话，那我就显得可笑了……因为毫无疑问，他是一只特别聪明的鹿。”

斑比鼓足勇气注视着老鹿王。“他好雄伟啊！”斑比绝望地想。

“好吧，还是下次再和他说话吧。”老鹿王决心离开，虽然他心里满是惆怅，但是背影还是那样雄伟。

斑比站在原地，伤心极了。

第十四章

烈日当空，森林里闷热无比。自从太阳升起来后，在广袤的天空之中，就连一小片云都寻不见了，只有那大火球高悬着。此时，之前蔚蓝色的天幕都烤成了苍白色。草地和树林都像在燃烧，上方呼呼冒着热气，如透明的波纹一般。无论是树叶还是青草，都纹丝不动。所有的鸟儿都躲进了树叶遮盖的荫蔽处，全都安静地闭上了嘴。所有的小路和小径上都是空荡荡的，没有一个动物在外游荡。这座森林就像被炫目的夏日晒伤了，呆滞地躺在那里，土壤、树木、动物呼吸着酷热的空气，全都没有了活力。

斑比睡着了。

昨晚，一整个晚上他都在和费琳嬉戏玩乐，甚至忘记了吃草，只是绕着费琳欢腾跳跃，一直到天大亮了，可那会儿他太累了，都不觉得饿了。他就躺在灌木丛的正中央，没一刻就闭上眼睛睡着了。

阳光照耀下，杜松散发出阵阵浓郁而刺鼻的苦辣味，月桂树散发出阵阵清香，这些味道萦绕在斑比头上，给他注入了新的活力。突然，他惊醒了。有鹿在叫唤，是费琳在叫他吗？斑比记得自己躺下时，费琳就在离他很近的地方吃山楂树叶。他以为费琳还在附近，但是环视一圈后并没有看见她。很显然，费琳现在不想单独待着，正叫斑比过去找她哩。

斑比一边听着，一边在想自己可能睡了多久，一边想费琳叫了他多少次。他想不出来，因为睡意还没有退去，他的头脑还不清醒。

远方又传来一声呼唤，斑比侧身一跳，便朝着那个声音走去。接着他又听见了一声呼唤，斑比瞬间觉得很开心，他清醒起来，冷静下来，浑身也充满了力量，只是这时饥饿也开始折磨他了。

又传来一声清晰的呼唤，像鸟儿在啼啭，充满了温情和渴望。那声音在呼唤：“我在这儿，快来！”

是的，那是她的声音，那是费琳的声音。斑比猛地冲出灌木丛，他跑得如此快，以至于干枯的树枝和被热透的绿叶都没怎么发出声音。

不过，斑比走在半路却突然停住了，因为老鹿王突然出现，挡住了他的去路。

此刻斑比的心里只有爱情，老鹿王在他眼里已经不重要了，以后还可以见到老鹿王。现在他没时间理会任何公鹿，不管他们有多么高贵。现在他的心里只有费琳。斑比匆忙问候了老鹿王就要离开。

“你要去哪里？”老鹿王急忙问。

斑比有一点尴尬，想找个借口糊弄过去，但是他打消了这个念头，诚实地回答：“去找费琳。”

“不要去！”老鹿王说。

斑比心里迅速闪过一丝愤怒，不要去找费琳？老鹿王怎么能这么说呢？“我要立刻飞奔过去。”斑比心里想。他望向老鹿王，刚好碰上老鹿王意味深长的目光，一下怔住了，虽然他心急如焚，但还是没有跑开。

“她在呼唤我，”斑比向老鹿王解释，语气明显很焦急，“不要让我待在这里说话了。”

“不，”老鹿王说，“那不是她在呼唤。”

这时又传来一声鸟儿啼啭般的呼唤声：“快来！”

“你听，”斑比急急说道，“她又在叫我了。”

“我听见了。”老鹿王点头。

“那……再见了！”斑比急匆匆往后退。

“站住！”老鹿王命令道。

“您这是做什么？”斑比急不可耐地大声问，“请让我走吧，我没时间了，费琳在叫我……你应该明白……”

“听我说，”老鹿王说，“那不是费琳。”

斑比绝望了。“但是，”他说，“我听得出那是她的声音。”

“听我的没错。”老鹿王继续说。

那温情又渴望的呼唤声再次传过来了，斑比如热锅上的蚂蚁，焦急得不得了。“就一会儿，”他恳求道，“我马上回来。”

“不，”老鹿王悲伤地说，“你要去了就回不来了，再也回不来了。”

又传来一声呼唤。“我必须去！我必须去！”斑比几乎失去理智了，大声地说。

“那么，”老鹿王用命令的口吻说，“我们一起过去！”

“快走！”斑比说着就往外跳。

“不，慢慢走。”老鹿王用不容置疑的口气命令他，“跟在我后面，一个脚印一个脚印地往前走。”

老鹿王开始往前走，斑比跟在后面，急得直叹气。

“听着，”老鹿王边走边说，“不管那边传来多少声呼唤，都不要离开我。如果是费琳，你很快就会见到她，但如果不是，你也不要被那

声音诱惑。现在，一切就取决于你是否相信我了。”

斑比不敢拒绝老鹿王，只好默默地答应了他的要求。

老鹿王缓缓向前走，斑比紧紧跟在后面。老鹿王多么聪明啊！他走得悄无声息，没有晃动一片树叶，也没有折断一根树枝，就这样悄悄钻进古老而繁茂的灌木丛，然后又静悄悄从中穿过。尽管斑比很心急，但他也惊呆了，不得不佩服起老鹿王来，他从来没有想过会有鹿走路能达到这个境地。

呼唤声一声声传来。老鹿王静静站着，一边听一边点头。斑比站在旁边急切得发抖，却不得不忍受老鹿王的束缚，他真不明白老鹿王在干什么。

老鹿王停下来好几次，即使没有呼唤声，也抬头聆听一会儿，然后点点头。斑比什么也没有听见。有时老鹿王还有意偏离呼唤声传来的方向，绕上几段路，这每每引起斑比内心极度的愤怒。

一声声呼唤不断传来，他们离传出呼唤声的地方越来越近，越来越近了，现在，他们就要到那个地方了。

老鹿王轻轻对斑比说：“不管你看见什么，都不要动，听见我说的话了吗？看我怎么做，你就跟着做。万事都要小心，千万别失去理智。”

他们又往前走了几步，突然，迎面扑来一股强烈的、摄人心魄的味道，那味道斑比再熟悉不过了。斑比吸入了太多这种气味，他就要叫出来了！他站在那里，四肢像是被钉在地面上一样。有那么一会儿，他的小心脏似乎都跳到嗓子眼儿了。老鹿王冷静地站在一旁，双目四处游走。

是他站在那里。

他就站在离斑比和老鹿王不远的地方，靠在一棵橡树的树干上，身体被榛树丛遮挡着，是他在轻轻地呼唤：“快来！这儿！”

斑比完全不知所措。他太害怕了，慢慢才明白过来，这声音是他模仿费琳发出来的，是他在一声声呼唤：“这儿！快来！”

斑比感觉自己被恐惧的利箭射穿，顿时产生了逃跑的念头。

“站着别动。”老鹿王及时说，仍是命令的语气，好像他预见了斑比会害怕，斑比只好努力控制自己。

斑比觉得在老鹿王最开始看他的目光中有责备的意味，尽管他处于害怕状态，但还是察觉到了这点，不过老鹿王又迅速换成了和蔼、认真的眼神。

斑比凝视着他身处的地方，眼睛不停地眨，好像再也不能忍受他的存在了。

老鹿似乎看出了斑比的心思，低声对他说：“我们回去吧。”然后就转身往回走。

他们小心翼翼地离开。老鹿王在前面曲折前进，走的路线很奇怪，斑比猜不出他的意图，但还是强忍不耐烦，很不愉快地跟在后面。之前斑比心里一直渴望找到费琳，可现在他的心里就只有逃跑的欲望了。

老鹿王依旧在前面，走得很慢，他依旧不时停下来，听一听周围动静，走上一阵又开始东拐西拐。

这时候，他们已经远离那个危险点了。“等他再停下来，”斑比心里想，“就可以好好和他说话，我要谢谢他。”

然而，老鹿王突然钻进一丛山茱萸，就在斑比的眼皮底下消失

了，而且在他经过的地方，一片树叶也没有晃动，一根树枝也没有被折断。

斑比跟上去，尝试像老鹿王一样悄然钻进灌木丛，尽力不弄出任何声音，可惜斑比不够幸运，他穿进去时树叶还是轻轻晃动了，被侧腹挤压的树枝反弹的时候也发出了“砰砰”的声音。

“他救了我的命，”斑比一直想，“我应该对他说什么呢？”

可是老鹿王已经消失了。斑比穿出灌木丛，眼前是一片繁花簇锦的秋麒麟草，他举目四望，看不见一片晃动的树叶。他又是独自一人了。

没有了老鹿王的束缚，斑比立刻响应内心冲动的呼唤，踏着矫健的步伐逃走了，脚下的秋麒麟草被踢向两边，沙沙作响，就像一把大镰刀在这里割草一样。

在漫步了好长一段时间后，斑比找到了费琳，他见着费琳时，又疲惫又开心，竟说不出话来了，心里久久不能平静。

“噢！亲爱的，”他说，“请你以后不要呼唤我了。我们分开后，我会一直寻找，直到我们找到彼此，但是请你再也不要呼唤我了……我真的无法抗拒你的声音。”

第十五章

几天过去了。这一天，在草地远处的那片橡树林里，斑比和费琳正无忧无虑地漫步。要到达斑比小时候走的小径，就是一棵高大的橡树旁边的那条小径，他们必须横穿草地。

眼看周围的橡树林越来越稀落，他们便停下来观察四周的情况。斑比和费琳都看见那棵橡树旁有一团红色的东西在移动。

“会是谁呢？”斑比小声问。

“可能是卡鲁斯或者罗奥吧。”费琳说。

斑比表示怀疑：“他们都不敢再靠近我了。”斑比一边说，一边盯着前方认真看。“不，”他肯定地说，“那不是卡鲁斯，也不是罗奥，分明是一只陌生的鹿。”

费琳同意斑比的看法，她既感到吃惊，又觉得好奇。“是的，”她说，“的确是一只陌生的鹿，我现在也看出来了，好神奇啊！”

他们都注视着那只陌生的鹿。

“他怎么那样走动，动作好大意啊！”费琳大声说。

“愚蠢！”斑比说，“真是愚蠢，他活脱脱像只小鹿，以为没有什么危险。”

“我们过去吧。”费琳提议说，她已经好奇得不行了。

“行，”斑比说，“我们过去吧，我想好好看看那只鹿。”

他们刚向前走了几步，费琳就停下脚步了。“万一你们打起来怎

么办？”她说，“他那么强壮。”

“呸，”斑比昂起头，露出不屑的神情，“你看他的鹿角多小啊，难道我还应该害怕他？那家伙确实比较胖，长得圆滚滚的，但是你要说他强壮，我可不这么看。走，过去看看。”

他们一同继续往前走。

那只鹿正在忙着啃树叶吃，都没注意到斑比和费琳向他走过去了，直到他俩走过了大半个草地才看见。然后，那只鹿竟然朝他俩跑过来，一蹦一跳的，活像个好奇的孩子。斑比和费琳吃惊地停下来，等着他跑过来停在离他俩几步之外的地方。

过了一会儿，那只鹿开口了：“难道你们都不认识我了吗？”

斑比低下头，做好打斗的准备。“难道你认识我们吗？”斑比向他发问。

“斑比！”对方脱口而出，语气十分肯定，还带有一丝责备的意味。

斑比听见对方喊出自己的名字，十分惊讶。那声音勾起了他心里久远的记忆，而这时费琳开始撒腿向那只陌生的鹿奔去。

“戈博。”她大喊了一声，就再也说不出话来，只是一动不动地站在那里，激动得快不能呼吸了。

“费琳，”戈博柔声喊道，“费琳，我的好姐姐，还是你认出了我。”他跑过去亲吻费琳，泪水止不住地往下流。费琳也哭了，她哽咽得说不出话来。

“哦，戈博！”错愕一旁的斑比颤抖着说，他深深被眼前这一幕触动了，同时又觉得这一切万分神奇，“天哪！这么说来，你没有死！”

戈博哈哈笑道：“你看出来我没有死了，我想，至少你能看出来这点。”

斑比继续问：“那当时在雪地里发生什么了？”

“哦，那时候啊？”戈博若有所思地说，“那个时候，是他救了我。”

“那这么长时间你都和他在一起吗？”费琳惊讶地问。

“是和他在一起，”戈博回答，“我一直和他住在一起。”

戈博没有继续往下说，他看着斑比和费琳如此惊讶的表情，觉得很有意思。接着，他说：“是的，亲爱的，我见过的世面比整个森林里所有动物见识的一切加起来的都还多。”他有一点得意洋洋，但是斑比和费琳没注意到这点，他们还沉浸在各自的讶异的情绪里。

“快给我们说说呀！”费琳欣喜若狂地说。

“啊，这个，”戈博很满意地说，“这个说来话长，一整天都讲不完呢！”

“那还等什么呢，快说吧！”斑比催促他。

可戈博转向费琳，畏怯而温柔地问：“妈妈还活着吗？”

“嗯，”费琳开心地说，“她还活着，但是我好长时间没有见过她了。”

“我现在就要去找她。”戈博下定决心，“你们要不和我一起？”

他们三个便一起上路了。

一路上，大家什么也没有说。戈博独自冲在前面没有说话，斑比

和费琳觉察到戈博渴望见到自己妈妈的心情，于是也都和戈博一样保持了沉默。

偶尔当戈博盲目穿过十字路口或者突然加速拐错了弯，他们才会叫住他，要么是斑比小声对他说“这边走，”要么是费琳叫住他：“不，不，现在我们该往这边走！”

斑比和费琳注意到，在好几次穿过大块空地的时候，戈博都是无所顾忌地往外冲，从不会停在灌木丛边上先观察一下，每每这个时候斑比和费琳就会相互看一眼，表示彼此都很惊讶，但是他们一个字也没有说，只是跟随戈博的脚步略显犹豫，有时不得不一边徘徊，一边四下观察。

戈博认出来那是他小时候走过的路，心里美滋滋的，一直没意识到是斑比和费琳在给他带路。他转身看着他们大声说：“你们瞧，我厉害吧？我还能找着当初走过的路。”斑比和费琳什么也没有说，只是相互交换了一下眼色。

不一会儿，大家来到一个树叶茂密的小洞前，费琳喊了声“这儿”就进去了。戈博跟上去，却又停了下来，眼前正是他和费琳出生的地方，也是小时候和妈妈住的地方。戈博和费琳看了对方一眼，谁也没说一句话。费琳温柔地亲了一下弟弟的嘴，然后他们又匆匆往前走。

他们前前后后走了近一个小时。树枝间照射下来的阳光越来越亮，森林变得越来越静谧，现在正是躺下来休息的时刻，但是戈博一点都不觉得累，反而在前面健步如飞地走。他焦躁不安地喘着粗气，漫无目的地东瞅西看。灌木丛里一只逃窜的黄鼠狼踩着了戈博的脚，他大惊失色，整个身子缩成一团；差点被戈博踩着的几只野鸡用力扑腾翅膀，骂骂咧咧，戈博自己也被吓得不轻。看着戈博这样奇怪、盲目的走路方式，斑比感到很惊讶。

又走了一会儿，戈博转身绝望地说：“妈妈根本就不在这里。”费琳看他一脸失望。她被这再也熟悉不过的表情触动了，于是急忙安慰他：“戈博，我们马上就找到她了，很快的。”

“要不我们叫她吧？”费琳微笑着说，“要不我们就像小时候那样呼唤她？”

斑比往前走了几步，接着就发现了埃娜阿姨，她正安静地躺在旁边的一个榛树丛里休息。

“终于找到了。”斑比自言自语道，费琳和戈博听见后马上跑过来。三只鹿站在一起看着埃娜阿姨。埃娜阿姨安静地抬起头，睁开睡意蒙眬的双眼，看着斑比他们。

戈博犹豫地走上前去，轻轻地喊了声：“妈妈。”

埃娜阿姨“唰”地跳起来，像被钉住了一样站在那里。戈博猛扑上去，又叫了一声：“妈妈。”他想再说点什么，可是什么也说不出。

埃娜阿姨一直盯着戈博的双眼，僵硬的身体动了一下，然后双肩和后背止不住地颤抖。

她没有问任何问题，她不想听任何解释和故事，只是缓缓地吻着自己的儿子，亲亲他的脸颊，亲亲他的脖子，就像孩子刚出生那会儿一样，不知疲倦地亲吻他的全身。

斑比和费琳悄悄离开了。

第十六章

在灌木丛正中央的一块空地上，大家围坐在一起，正在听戈博讲述他的故事。

连野兔也来了，他竖起一只耳朵聚精会神地听，觉得这一切太神奇了，那勺子似的耳朵刚一耷拉下去，就又立马竖起来了。

一棵山毛榉上面，一只喜鹊停在离地面最近的树枝上，听得出神。一只松鸦不安分地坐在对面的白蜡树上，每次听到自觉惊奇的地方就会大叫一声。

几只野鸡也来了，还带上了各自的妻子和孩子。他们听到神奇的地方就都伸长脖子，偶尔惊得说不出话来，身子往前倾，然后左右乱扭头。

松鼠在树上蹿上蹿下，手舞足蹈的，听得很激动。他一会儿滑到地面上，一会儿又爬到树上或其他地方，或者靠着尾巴安稳坐好，露出白白的胸脯。他不时地想打断戈博说点什么，但总有动物严厉地训斥他：“安静点！”

戈博告诉大家，当时他正无助地躺在雪地里，等待着死亡的到来。

“先是猎狗发现了我，”他说，“那些狗特别可怕，这世上再找不出比他们还可怕的生物了。他们张着血盆大口，对着我无情地怒吼。”他环视一周，继续说：“可是，后来我也和他们一起玩耍，就像和你们当中某一个一起玩耍一样。”他很骄傲地说：“我再也不用害怕他们了，现在我和他们是好朋友。不过要是他们一生起气乱吠的话，我还是会耳朵嗡嗡响，呼吸急促，但是他们并没有想伤害我，我刚说

过，我是他们的朋友，只是他们的叫声……确实震耳欲聋。”

“接着刚才的说。”费琳催促他。

戈博看着费琳，说：“好吧，那些猎狗当时可能会把我撕成碎片，但是这时候他出现了。”

戈博说到这里停了一下，大家都屏住呼吸听他说。

“嗯，”戈博继续说，“他走过来，叫猎狗不要叫了，猎狗立马安静下来，他又叫了声，他们全都老老实实趴在他的脚边。然后他来抱我，我就尖叫，但他没有伤害我，只是轻轻地抚摸我，然后用手把我抱起来，后来他就把我扛走了。”

费琳打断他，问：“什么是‘扛’啊？”

戈博于是开始向她详细解释“扛”的意思。

“其实很简单，”斑比插话说，“你想想松鼠搬坚果的样子，那就是‘扛’，松鼠就是‘扛’着坚果走的。”

松鼠趁机开始说：“我的一个表哥……”他刚急切地开了个头，大家立刻叫起来：“安静！安静！让戈博继续说。”

松鼠不得不闭上嘴，用前爪用力地按着自己的白胸脯，十分绝望，然后他又开始找喜鹊说：“我跟你讲，我有一个表哥……”可喜鹊呢，却只是转过去背对他。

戈博继续讲述他的传奇故事：“有时候，外面冷得刺骨，暴风雨在怒吼，但是里面就像夏天一样暖和，一丝寒风也没有。”

“嚯！”松鸦发出一声尖叫。

“有时候，外面大雨倾盆，到处都被雨水浸湿了，但是一滴水都

进不到里面，身上永远是干的。”

听到这儿，野鸡再次伸长脖子，歪着脑袋思考。

“有时候，外面的世界全被雪覆盖了，但是我在里面很暖和，甚至觉得热。他给我吃干草、栗子、土豆，还有萝卜，我想吃什么就吃什么。”

“啊？”大家异口同声叫了出来，感到难以置信。

“对，新鲜美味的干草。”戈博又平静地说了一遍，然后得意地望着周围的大伙儿。

松鼠又插嘴进来：“我有一个表哥……”

大家立刻吼道：“安静！”

“大冬天的，他从哪儿去给你弄干草和其他东西啊？”费琳急问道。

“他自己种的，”戈博回答，“他想要什么，就种什么；他想要什么，就把什么保存下来。”

费琳继续问：“戈博，你和他在一起，难道没有害怕过他吗？”

戈博露出优越十足的微笑，说：“没有，亲爱的费琳，我从来没有害怕过。我知道他不会伤害我，为什么还要害怕呢？大家都觉得他很可怕，可是他根本就不可怕。如果他喜欢你，或者你为他效劳，那么他就会对你很好，非常好。世界上没有比他更善良的了。”

正当戈博大肆夸奖他的时候，老鹿王突然从灌木丛中走出来，悄无声息地出现在大家面前。

老鹿王站在那里，岿然不动，用深邃而严肃的目光盯着戈博。

戈博还在说：“不只是他爱我，连他的孩子也很爱我。他的妻子和大家一起经常抚摸我，和我一起玩。”说着，他突然停住了，因为他看见了老鹿王。

周围安静了一会儿。

过了一会儿，老鹿王用沉稳而又威严的口吻问戈博：“你那脖子上戴着的是什么带子？”

大家望向戈博，这才发现他脖子上有一圈由马毛编织成的深色带子。

戈博紧张地说：“那个？我……戴的……那是缰绳的一部分。是他给我的戴上的，这象征着很高的荣誉，这……”戈博越说越混乱，越说越结巴。

大家都不再说话。老鹿王用锐利而悲伤的眼神看了戈博好长时间。

“可怜的东西。”最后他轻轻地说了这么一句，就转身离开了。

大家听老鹿王这么一说，都吃了一惊，但谁也没说话。不过那只松鼠又开始了：“我刚刚说，我有一个表哥，他也和他在一起。他被抓住了，然后被关了好久好久，直到有一天我爸爸……”

但谁也没有听松鼠说，大家都散开了。

第十七章

这一天，玛丽娜又出现在大家的面前。在戈博离开的那个冬天，玛丽娜就已经成年，但是后来一直单独生活，平日里也独来独往，所以大家就很少看见她。

玛丽娜身材纤细，看起来很年轻。不过，和其他鹿比起来，她显得更安静、温柔，也更加稳重。戈博从奇妙的探险之旅中回来了，森林里松鼠、松鸦、画眉鸟和野鸡奔走相告，传递着这个消息，玛丽娜得知后，就特地去看望戈博。

玛丽娜的拜访让戈博妈妈感到非常高兴和自豪。戈博妈妈听说森林里的动物们都在谈论她的儿子，为自己有这样一个儿子感到骄傲。她沉浸在这份荣耀里，想让每个动物都知道她的儿子是最聪明能干、最优秀的鹿。

“玛丽娜，你觉得我们戈博怎么样？”戈博妈妈大声问道。“你觉得他怎么样？”没等玛丽娜回答，她就继续说道：“艾特拉太太曾说戈博太没用了，就因为他在寒冷的时候颤抖了一下，她还预言说戈博只会让我操心。你还记得她的话吗？”

“嗯，我记得。”玛丽娜说，“不过，您确实是为戈博费了不少心。”

“那都是过去的事了，现在已经不会了！”戈博妈妈纠正道。她很奇怪怎么大家还能记得那些事情。“唉，我真为艾特拉感到难过，她已经去世了，也无法看到我们戈博变得如此优秀，真是挺遗憾的！”

“是啊，可怜的艾特拉太太。”玛丽娜温柔地说，“这对她来说，实在是挺可惜的。”

戈博喜欢听妈妈以这种方式夸赞他。他站在旁边，听着妈妈赞美的话，心里美滋滋的，就像沐浴在阳光下一样快乐。

“就连老鹿王都来看望戈博，”戈博妈妈轻声告诉玛丽娜，似乎在讲一件庄严而神秘的事，“在以前，他从来不会出现在我们面前，但是他竟破例来看戈博了。”

“为什么他说我是‘可怜的东西’呢？”戈博十分不满地插话，“我知道他为什么要这么说。”

“别去想这件事了，”戈博妈妈安慰他说道，“他不过是一个老怪物！”

最后，为了安慰自己，戈博这样说：“这句话一整天都萦绕在我的脑海里，他说我是‘可怜的东西’，但是我不是，我很幸运。我比森林里所有人都见得多，经历得多，比他们更了解这个世界，比他们更懂得生活。玛丽娜，你觉得呢？”

“是的，”她回答，“没有人能够否认这一点。”

从那以后，玛丽娜就和戈博形影不离了。

第十八章

这一天，斑比去找老鹿王，他在林间走了一整晚，直到太阳升起，黎明的光辉照在他身上。斑比并没有和费琳在一起，他独自一人走在无人走过的小径上。

有的时候，斑比发现自己仍然会被费琳吸引，自己仍像以前一样爱着她。他喜欢和她一起散步，喜欢听她讲话，喜欢和她一起在草地上或者灌木丛中吃草，但是，他却不能从费琳身上找到满足的感觉了。

从前和费琳在一起时，斑比几乎想不起来要和老鹿王见面，只会偶尔去看看他。现在，斑比感觉自己被一种无名的欲望驱使，他想要去找老鹿王，渴望见到他。这种时候，斑比只有偶尔才会想到费琳。如果斑比愿意，他也可以和费琳一起去找老鹿王，除了戈博和埃琳娜阿姨以外，他并不介意和谁待在一起。

老鹿王对戈博说的那句话给斑比留下了很深的印象，那句话一直在斑比的耳边回响。从戈博第一天回来起，斑比就觉得他不正常。斑比不知道为什么看着戈博的举止行为，他就感到难受和羞愧，同时，他也不知道自己为什么开始害怕戈博。现在这个戈博不太懂事，总是自我感觉良好，一副自鸣得意的样子，而且变得爱慕虚荣。无论什么时候和戈博走在一起，斑比脑子里就会响起老鹿王说的话——“可怜的东西”。斑比始终忘不掉那句话。

一个漆黑的夜晚，为了逗鸣角鸮高兴，斑比又假装被他吓了一跳。他突然想，为何不问问鸣角鸮呢，也许他知道老鹿王在哪里，于是他问鸣角鸮：“您知道现在老鹿王在哪里吗？”

鸣角鸮用咕咕的声音回答斑比，说他根本不知道老鹿王在哪里，

但是斑比感觉鸣角鸮知道，只是他不想告诉自己而已。

“不，”斑比说，“我不相信您不知道，您这么聪明！您知道这个森林里发生的所有事情，您当然知道现在老鹿王藏在哪里。”

这时，本来全身羽毛蓬松的鸣角鸮梳了梳自己的羽毛，整个身体变得小了些，他回答说：“我当然知道他在哪里。”他回答斑比时，依旧是咕咕的声音，但是更加柔和，“但是我不应该告诉你，我真的不能告诉你老鹿王在哪里。”

斑比开始恳求他：“我不会告诉其他动物的，我这么敬重您，怎么可能出卖您呢？”

鸣角鸮听了后心情大悦，又把自己的羽毛抖松开去，变成了一个可爱的、软软的灰白色圆球，微微转动着那双可爱的大眼睛：“这么说，你真的尊重我喽，可是为什么啊？”

斑比丝毫没有犹豫，真诚地说：“因为您很聪明，性格好，待人也友好。还有啊，你懂得怎么吓其他动物，您的方法真是太妙了，特别的棒！我希望自己也能学得一星半点。要是我也学会了，那用处就大了。”

听到斑比这么一说，一旁的鸣角鸮急忙把嘴塞进胸前的绒毛里，偷偷乐起来。

“好吧，”他说，“我知道老鹿王见到你会很高兴的。”

“您真这样觉得吗？”高兴的斑比大声地问，心跳得更快了。

“当然了，我敢肯定。”鸣角鸮回答，“他见到你会高兴的，而且我觉得我现在可以冒这个险，告诉你他在哪里。”

他边说边收拢羽毛，整个身子又突然一下变小了。

“你知不知道柳树旁边的那条水沟？”

斑比点了点头。

“你知不知道草地远处有片橡树林？”

“不知道，”斑比说，“我没有去过那里。”

“好吧，你仔细听我说，”鸣角鸮悄声说，“草地远处有一片橡树林。你先穿过那片橡树林，然后会看见那里有灌木丛、榛树丛、银白杨树、荆棘和唐棣，在它们中间躺着一棵山毛榉，即使你站着也很难看见它，你这个高度还不够，你要想办法找到那棵山毛榉。那个老鹿王就藏身在山毛榉的树干下，但是可别说是我告诉你的。”

“在树干下？”斑比问。

“是的，”鸣角鸮笑着说，“地上有一块地方是凹进去的，那个树干刚好横在那上面，老鹿王就睡在树干下。”

“谢谢您！”斑比诚挚地说，“我不知道自己能不能找到，但是无论如何都很感激您。”他说完就跑去找了。

鸣角鸮悄悄跟在斑比后面，准备吓他，他突然大声叫：“噢哟！呀！”斑比不由地缩成一团。

“我不会是吓着你了吧？”

“嗯……是的……”斑比结结巴巴地回答。这次他是真的被吓到了。

鸣角鸮很满意，温声细语地说：“我其实只是想提醒你一下，别告诉他是我告诉你的。”

“我当然不会。”斑比让他千万放心这一点，然后又继续往前走

去。

斑比刚走到那个水沟，老鹿王就从黑漆漆的夜色里冒出来，无声无息地出现在斑比面前，把他吓得后退了好几步。

“我没有住在之前那个地方了。”老鹿王说。

斑比没有开口说话。

“你想干什么？”老鹿王问。

“没什么，”斑比吞吞吐吐地说，“没事，不好意思，真的没什么事。”

过了一会儿，老鹿王用温柔的声音说：“这已经不是你第一次找我了。”

他说完等着斑比回答，但是斑比什么都没说。老鹿王继续说道：“昨天你两次从我旁边走过去，今天早上也是，当时你离我非常近。”

“噢！”斑比鼓起勇气问，“您为什么要那么说戈博？”

“你觉得我说错了吗？”

“不，”斑比伤心地说，“不，我感觉您说得对。”

老鹿王微微点了下头，用比以前更亲切的目光看着他。

“可是为什么呢？”斑比问，“我不明白。”

“你能感觉到我没说错就已经很好了，日后你会明白的，”老鹿王说，“再见了。”

第十九章

没过多长时间，大家都发现戈博的行为习惯有点奇怪、可疑。夜晚大家都醒着时，他却在睡觉；白天大家都找地方睡觉，他却十分清醒，而且还四处漫步。无论什么时候，只要他乐意，就会毫不犹豫地走出树林，跑到草地上优哉游哉地站着，哪怕是大白天也是这样。

斑比实在看不下去了，他问戈博：“你难道没有想过外面会有危险吗？”

“不，”戈博简单地说，“对我来说，根本不存在什么危险。”

“亲爱的斑比，”这时戈博妈妈说话了，“你忘记了，你忘记了戈博是他的朋友。虽然大家不能去冒险，但是戈博完全可以。”她很自豪。

后来，斑比再也没有说过什么。

有一天，戈博对斑比说：“你知道吗？我觉得等自己饿了才去找吃的，这事儿有点奇怪。”

斑比很不解，说：“怎么会奇怪呢？我们大家都是这样的啊。”

“哦，你们是这样。”戈博傲慢地说，“我之前的生活和这有点不一样。之前都是他把食物送到我面前，或者准备好了再叫我，我已经习惯那样了。”

斑比听后同情地看着戈博，他看了下费琳、玛丽娜和埃娜阿姨，发现她们都微笑着，一副很崇拜戈博的表情。

“戈博，我觉得让你适应这里的冬天可能会有点困难，”费琳第一

个开口说，“我们冬天没有干草，没有胡萝卜，也没有土豆。”

“是啊，”戈博略有所思地说，“我还没有想过这个问题，我无法想象到时候会是什么感觉，肯定会觉得可怕吧。”

斑比平静地说：“不会可怕，只是有点难熬而已。”

“好吧，”戈博堂而皇之地说，“万一觉得太难熬了，我就干脆回到他身边去。我干吗要在这里挨饿啊？根本没有这个必要嘛。”

斑比听他这么说，一言不发地离开了。

当戈博和玛丽娜单独在一起的时候，他就开始和玛丽娜谈论斑比，他说：“他根本就不理解我。可怜的斑比啊，他还以为我是之前那个瘦弱的戈博。我早已经变得与以往不同了，可他永远都不能接受这个事实。危险？呵……他以为危险是什么？他一个劲说我面临着危险。对他还有和他一样的动物来说，确实存在危险，可对我来说，并没有危险存在。”

玛丽娜同意戈博说的话。她和戈博深爱着彼此，生活得十分幸福。

“好吧，”他对她说，“谁也不能像你这样理解我，不过我也用不着抱怨，毕竟大家都尊敬我，爱戴我，但只有你是最了解我的。我给大家讲他有多好时，虽然大家听得很认真，也不觉得我是撒谎，但是他们还是觉得他是可怕的。”

“我一直都相信他很善良。”玛丽娜做梦似的说。

“真的吗？”戈博很快活地问。

“还记得你独自躺在雪地里那天吗？”玛丽娜继续说，“我曾经说过，有一天他会来到森林里，和我们一起玩。”

“是吗？”戈博打了个哈欠，“我不记得你说过。”

几周过去了。这天早上，斑比和费琳漫步回来，正要去寻找藏身的地方，结果半路碰见了戈博和玛丽娜，当时戈博正要往草地上走。就在年久而熟悉的榛树丛里，四只鹿站在了一起。

“和我们待在一起吧，”斑比说，“太阳一会儿就升起来了，谁也不会在这时候去草地上的。”

“胡扯，”戈博不屑地说，“他们不去，我去。”

戈博说完就往前走了，玛丽娜也跟了上去。

斑比和费琳留在原处。“走，”斑比生气地对费琳说，“走。咱俩不管他，随便他吧。”

他们也上了路。突然，草地那头传来松鸦尖厉的鸣叫声。斑比转身一跃，快速向戈博跑去，在那棵高大的橡树旁边追上了戈博和玛丽娜。

“你听见没有？”斑比大声对戈博说。

“什么？”戈博吃惊地问。

草地那头又传来一声松鸦的尖叫。

“你听见没有？”斑比又问了一句。

“没有。”戈博平静地说。

“那是危险的信号。”斑比继续说。

一只喜鹊也开始大声叫唤了，紧接着是第二只，第三只。松鸦不停地发出一声声尖叫，头顶上的乌鸦也在发出警告。

费琳央求道：“戈博，别去那边了，那里很危险！”

连玛丽娜也开始恳求戈博：“就到这里了吧，亲爱的，今天别过去了，那边有危险。”

戈博站在那里，依旧摆出一副优越者的姿态：“你们不停地说危险、危险，危险和我有关系吗？”

看戈博如此不屑的神情，斑比突然想到了一个办法，说：“那至少先让玛丽娜离开，这样我们就知道……”

没等他说完，玛丽娜就悄悄往草地走去了。

他们三个站在那里看着玛丽娜。斑比和费琳屏住呼吸盯着玛丽娜看，戈博显得很有耐心，好像是专门等着欣赏他俩看见自己的愚蠢念头被验证的样子。

他们看见玛丽娜一步一步穿过草地，她抬头四处看，脚步很犹豫，仔细闻着各个方向的空气。突然，她向高空中蹦了一下，像闪电一样往树林里跑，像是被飓风击中了一样。

“是他，是他。”她小声说道。因为恐惧，她嗓音都颤抖着，浑身也在发抖。她吞吞吐吐地说：“我……我看见他了，我看见他就站在那片桉树林旁边。”

“走，”斑比大声说，“快走。”

“走吧，”费琳哀求戈博。玛丽娜已经被吓得几乎说不出话了，她低声对戈博说：“戈博，求求你，快走吧！”

但是戈博还是没有移动半步，他说：“你们跑吧，能跑多快就跑多快，我不拦着你们。如果是他在那里，那我要和他谈谈。”

大家怎么都劝不动戈博。

他们站在那里看着戈博走出去。大家都被他的自信感染了，同时心里也都隐隐为他感到担忧。

戈博大方地走在草地上，开始找寻桤木林。过了一会儿，他好像找到了桤木林，又好像是看见了他。这时，草地上响起了那熟悉的、雷鸣般的声音。

戈博应声跳起来，突然一个转身，摇摇晃晃地朝树林里跑。

戈博跑回树林时，大家还站在那里，一个个都被吓呆了。大家看见戈博大口地喘着气，但是他并没有停下来，而是接着往前狂奔，斑比、费琳和玛丽娜见状也都跟着跑了过去。

突然，可怜的戈博倒在了地上，紧挨着他的玛丽娜停下来看他，斑比和费琳站在几步之外，准备随时逃跑。

戈博躺在那里，他的侧腹裂开了一个口，血淋淋的肠子直往外冒。他无力地抬起头，微微转动了一下身体。

“玛丽娜，”他吃力地说，“玛丽娜……”他没有认出玛丽娜来，声音也渐渐低了下去。

这时，草地旁边的灌木丛中传来一阵“唰唰唰”的响声。玛丽娜将头靠近戈博，发疯地大声喊：“戈博，他就快过来了，你能不能站起来和我一起走？”

戈博再一次虚弱地抬起头来，四脚抽搐了几下，就再也动不了了。

远处传来“咔咔”“啪啪”“唰唰”的声音，他已经从灌木丛走出来了。

玛丽娜看见他近在眼前。她慢慢地移动，然后钻进最近的灌木

丛，向斑比和费琳追去。

她回头看了一眼，看见他弯下腰抓住了受伤的戈博。

不久后，大家就听见了戈博垂死挣扎时发出的阵阵哀号。

第二十章

森林里有一条小溪，那里的溪水总是欢快地向前流淌，岸边长满了绿葱葱的芦苇和黑柳树，斑比正独自走在溪边。

最近，斑比常去小溪边散步，他大多时候都是独自待着。那里只有一两条小径，他在那里几乎不会遇见任何朋友。这正是斑比需要的环境，因为他所考虑的问题越来越严肃，他的内心也变得越来越沉重。他不知道自己内在到底发生了什么变化，甚至根本就没有注意到这些变化。他只是漫不经心地想事情，他的整个生活都似乎变得暗淡无光了。

他经常在岸边一站就是几小时，所有思绪都驻留在那条弯曲的小溪上。水面上吹来凉悠悠的风儿，夹带着一股独特、清爽、浓郁的气息，让斑比忘却了心中的烦忧，也让他重拾了自信。

斑比总是站在岸边观看一群在水里嬉戏的鸭子。水里的鸭子互相友好地交谈，很认真，也很愉快，从来没有停下来过。

水里还有几只母鸭，每一只母鸭周围都围着一群小鸭子。那几位鸭妈妈一直不停地教自己的孩子，而那些小鸭子就一直在边上学习。有时，其中某位或者几位鸭妈妈会发出一声警告，小鸭子就会从四面八方往回冲，过一会儿，小鸭子又都各自散开，游向各处，而且不会发出一点声响。那些小鸭子在水中的密芦苇丛之间游来游去，不会碰到一根芦苇，也不会被摇晃的茎秆阻挡。斑比就站在一旁看着他们，他还看见一只小黑鸭一会儿钻进这边的水里，过一会儿又从那边的芦苇丛中冒出来，再过一会儿又不见了踪影。

过了一些时候，一位鸭妈妈突然发出警报声，小鸭们再次聚集在鸭妈妈的周围。这些小鸭子就像一支小舰队一样，一会儿集合在一

起，一会儿又各自出征。斑比每次看见他们集合和散开的过程，都会惊叹不已，觉得这简直太神奇了。

警报又响过一次后，斑比问其中一位鸭妈妈：“发生了什么？我认真观察周围，什么也没有啊？”

“本来就没有什么。”母鸭子说。

警报又响了，这次是一只小鸭子。他发出信号后，迅速游过芦苇丛，不一会儿就出现在斑比站立的水畔边，然后上岸了。

“什么事儿也没有。”那只刚游上岸的小鸭子一边说，一边像成年的鸭子一样抖抖尾部羽毛上的水，梳理好羽毛。没过一会儿，他又跳进了水里。

不过，斑比还是对鸭子充满信心。他得出一个结论：鸭子比自己更机灵，无论是视力还是听力都比自己灵敏。在其他时候，斑比心里总有一股紧张的情绪，但当看着水中的鸭子时，他那股紧张感就没那么明显了。

他也喜欢和鸭子聊天。之前，斑比总是听别人说无聊的东西，可他和鸭子聊天从不说那些废话，他们谈论广袤的天空和风，谈论他们之前在远处田野吃过的珍馐美味。

偶尔斑比还会看见有个鸟儿“嗖嗖”地掠过溪边。那是一只蜂鸟，身上布满了火红色的条纹，他边飞边发出“嘶——嘶”的声音，像一个在空中呼呼作响的小斑点。他掠着水面疾驰而去，有时候像是绿色的光芒，有时候又像是红色。斑比看得激动起来，他想近距离看看那只色彩鲜艳的陌生鸟儿，于是大声地叫他。

“别叫他了，”芦苇丛中一只长嘴秧鸡对斑比说道，“别叫了，他不会理你的。”

“你在哪里？”斑比边问边往芦苇丛中看。

不过这时，那只长嘴秧鸡又在另一个地方大声笑起来：“我在这儿。你刚刚叫的那个鸟儿，他是一个古怪的家伙，从来不和谁说话，你叫他没用的。”

“他长得可真俊啊。”斑比说。

“可惜他的性格不好。”长嘴秧鸡说。

她又跑到一个新的地方，说：“他不关心任何事情，也不关心任何人。不管发生了什么事儿，他都不管。他也不和谁说话，即便有人问候他，他也从来不表示感谢。要是有危险的话，他也不会发出一声警告。这家伙从来没对活着的生物说过一个字。”

“可怜的……”斑比说。

没待斑比说完，那欢快、尖厉的声音又从远处传来：“估计他以为大家都嫉妒他身上那可笑的斑纹，所以不想让谁看清楚。”

“有些人是不愿意别人看清楚他们。”斑比说。

一眨眼的工夫，长嘴秧鸡就已经出现在斑比的面前了，她不太安分地站在那里，光洁整齐的羽毛沾满了水珠，在阳光下闪闪发光，娇巧的身子充满了生气，十分满足的样子。“我觉得看一看无所谓啊。”她简单说了这么一句，又立刻消失了。

她在水里冒起来，说：“我搞不懂怎么有的人能在一个地方站那么久。”然后，声音又从远处传来：“长时间站在一个地方不仅无聊，还有危险。”然后，另一边又响起她欢快的声音：“你得经常动，要想安全和身体健康的话，你就要不断走动。”

草地里传来一阵“沙沙沙”的响声，斑比吃了一惊。他望向周围，

看见灌木丛里闪过一阵红影，然后又消失在芦苇丛中。斑比闻到一股浓烈的血腥味，同时看见一只狐狸正偷偷摸摸地往那边走。

他想大声叫，想用力踏地发出声音，这样就可以提醒鸭子，可当时狐狸正快速跳跃着将莎草分开，叶片发出了“沙沙”的响声，他们根本听不见，就在这时狐狸几步上前，迅速抓住了一只鸭子。水花四溅，传来鸭子绝望的叫声。斑比听见鸭子在用力扑腾翅膀。透过树叶的缝隙，他看见了鸭子雪白的身体，看见她在使劲地拍打狐狸的头。不一会儿，周围就安静下来了。

然后，斑比看见狐狸叼着鸭子从灌木丛里走出来，可怜的鸭子脖子向下耷拉着，翅膀还在乱动。不过狐狸根本没注意这些，他轻蔑地看了一眼站在一旁的斑比，然后慢慢地潜进了树林里。

斑比一动不动地站在那里。

几只老鸭子拍动翅膀无助地乱飞，那只长嘴秧鸡向各个方向发出警报，灌木丛里的山雀大声地叫着，那群失去妈妈的小鸭子围着长嘴秧鸡轻声抽泣。

之前飞走的蜂鸟又飞回了岸边。

“请告诉我们，”年幼的鸭子哭着说，“请你告诉我们，你看见我们的妈妈了吗？”

“嘶——嘶——”蜂鸟发出尖锐的叫声，然后飞走了：“你们的妈妈和我有什么关系啊？”

斑比转身离开了。他穿过一片黄花的海洋，经过一片山毛榉幼林，又跨过一片老榛树林，最后来到那条深水沟的边上。他在那里转来转去，希望再次遇见老鹿王。自从戈博死后，他已经有很长一段时间没有见过老鹿王了。

过了一会儿，他瞥见远方有一个身影，正是老鹿王，他立马就朝那个身影跑了过去。他们并肩沉默地走了一会儿，后来老鹿王开口问：“那个，他们是不是还像以前那样说他啊？”

斑比知道老鹿王指的是戈博，便回答说：“我不知道，我现在几乎都是独自待着。”他犹豫了一下，又说：“我经常會想起他。”

“是吗？”老鹿王说，“你现在一个人了？”

“是的。”斑比说，他期待老鹿王听后会有所反应，但是老鹿王什么也没有说。

他们继续往前走，突然老鹿王停下脚步，问斑比：“你有没有听见那个声音？”

斑比听了听，但什么也没有听见。

“跟我来。”老鹿王说，然后往前快速走去。斑比跟着他。过了一会儿，老鹿王又停下来，问：“你还没听见吗？”

斑比这次听见了一阵沙沙声，感觉像是被压弯的树枝不断反弹回去而发出的声音，但他不知道那是什么，除此之外，还有一个什么东西毫无节律地撞击地面发出的沉闷响声。

斑比想逃走，但是被老鹿王喝住了：“跟我走。”说完，他就往发出声音的那个方向跑去。站在老鹿王旁边的斑比壮着胆子问了一句：“为什么要过去？难道那里不危险吗？”

“那里特别危险。”老鹿王神秘地说。

很快，他们就看见一些树枝在猛烈地摇晃，像是一会儿被什么拽了下去，一会儿又反弹回来。他们继续靠近，然后看见灌木丛中间有一条小径往外延伸出去。

地面上躺着一只野兔，他从这边荡到那边，一会儿静止不动，然后又开始翻滚。他每动一下，头上的树枝就会跟着动一下。

斑比注意到树枝上有一根黑色的绳子垂下来，正好勒在野兔的脖子上。

野兔一定听到有人在靠近他，所以他激动地腾向空中，然后又摔倒在地上。他想逃离束缚他的绳子，于是不停地在草地上翻腾打滚。

“躺着别动。”老鹿王先是命令他，然后用充满同情又温柔的声音对他说：“放轻松，野兔朋友，是我。现在不要动，安静地躺好了。”斑比听见老鹿王对野兔重复说着这些话。

野兔一动不动地平躺在地上，喉咙里发出快要窒息的声音。

老鹿王咬紧拴住兔子的那根树枝，拉着它，然后弯下腰，用全身的力量把那根树枝弯到地上，再用脚踩住，之后用鹿角把它折断了。

接着，他鼓励性地向野兔点点头，说：“躺着别动，就算我弄疼你了，也不要动。”

他将头扭向一侧，把其中一只鹿角往野兔的脖子边上靠，然后插进野兔耳朵后的毛里去挑那根绳子，他刚试着点了下头，野兔就开始翻滚了。

老鹿王见状立马后退，命令野兔说：“别动，这可是关系你性命的事情。”野兔躺在那里，喘着粗气，让老鹿王再次帮他挑那根绳子。斑比看着这一幕，一时间说不出话来。

那插在野兔皮毛里的鹿角已经钻进了绳套里，老鹿王几乎是跪在地上，扭动脖子一点点往里钻，看起来就像是要向别人进攻一样。终于，那绳套开始松了……

野兔又能再次呼吸了，同时他又害怕，又痛苦，不禁大声哭喊：“啊——”

老鹿王停下来，大声说：“安静点！”然后用温柔但略带责备的语气又说了一遍：“安静点。”老鹿王把嘴贴在兔子的肩上，把鹿角上的一个角杈放在野兔两个勺子似的耳朵正中间，这架势就像是要将野兔撕成两半一样。

“这种时候怎么还犯傻？”老鹿王温柔地嘟囔道，“你这样大叫是想把狐狸招过来吗？是这样吗？我觉得你不想狐狸过来吧，所以现在给我安静点。”

老鹿王集中所有力量，继续在野兔头上小心翼翼地工作。突然绳套“啪”地断开了，野兔跳出来，终于获得了自由。刚开始，野兔甚至没有意识到自己重获了自由，他向外迈了一步，然后又呆呆坐下了。过了一会儿，他才一蹦一跳离开了，开始的时候胆小如鼠，慢慢地往前蹦，然后就越来越快了，最后撒腿就跑走了。

斑比在后面望着野兔，惊讶地说：“他怎么都没有对你说一声谢谢啊？”

老鹿王说：“没事，他还处于惊恐之中。”

被解开的绳套躺在地面，斑比轻轻碰了一下，竟然发出“咔咔”的响声，把斑比吓了一大跳。他好像从来就没有听过这样的声音。

“这是他做的吗？”斑比轻声问。

老鹿王点了点头。

他俩静静往前走着。老鹿王说：“你在进入小径之前要格外小心，要检查所有的树枝，用你的鹿角朝各个方向捅一下，如果听见那个声音，就要马上转身跑。鹿角脱落的那段时间，更是要谨慎。我再

也不走小径了。”

斑比听完后，陷入了沉思。

“他不在这里。”他自言自语道，觉得很惊讶。

“对，他现在不在森林里。”老鹿王说。

“可是，他又在这里……”斑比摇着头说。

老鹿王接着说，语气充满苦涩：“戈博怎么可以……他是不是告诉你们他无所不能，还很善良？”

“他对戈博很好。”斑比小声说。

老鹿王停下脚步，有些悲伤地问：“斑比，你相信他说的吗？”这是老鹿王第一次叫斑比的名字。

“我不知道，”斑比痛苦地说，“我一点都不明白。”

老鹿王缓缓地说：“我们必须学会生存，学会对一切保持谨慎。”

第二十一章

这天清晨，斑比不幸遇险了。

黎明时分，第一缕曙光刚照进森林，乳白色的雾弥漫在草地上方，乌鸦、喜鹊和松鸦都还在睡梦中，四周静悄悄的。

斑比昨天晚上遇见了费琳。当时，费琳十分羞涩，她看着斑比的眼神满是悲伤。

“现在我基本上是一个人了。”她说得很小声。

“我也是。”斑比语气很犹豫。

“为什么你不和我在一起？”费琳伤心地问。看着一向开心活泼的费琳突然变得这么忧伤、这么严肃，斑比心里很不是滋味。

“因为我想独自生活。”斑比说。尽管他用的是最温柔的语气，但这句话听起来还是那么令人伤心，连斑比自己都感觉到了。

费琳望着斑比，柔声问：“你还爱我吗？”

“我不知道。”斑比回答她的语气和之前一样。

费琳听完，静静地走开了，把斑比留在原处。

斑比站在那棵高大的橡树下，望着草地边缘。他谨小慎微地观察四周，陶醉在清晨清新、纯净的空气中。草地、露水、润湿的树林……大地上的一切都是湿漉漉、清凉凉的。斑比大口大口地呼吸着空气，忽然感受到了久违的自由，然后快乐地向薄雾笼罩的草地走去。

突然，草地上响起了雷鸣般的声音——“轰”！

斑比感觉自己受到了强烈的冲击，快站不稳了。

他害怕极了，转身疯狂地跑回树林，然后一直往前跑。他不知道发生了什么，也顾不得去想任何事情，只知道不停地往前跑。他没有目的地往前跑，心中充满了恐惧，快喘不过气来了。突然，他感到身体一阵剧痛，疼得受不了。他感觉自己左肩上有一股热流往下，似乎是从疼痛的部位流出来的。斑比不得不放慢奔跑的脚步，然后他明白过来，自己的脚已经跛了。他跌跌撞撞了几步，便倒下了。

斑比倒在那里，那可不是躺下来休息的舒服地方。

“起来！斑比！站起来！”老鹿王突然站在他旁边，轻轻地推他的肩膀。

老鹿王一直重复叫他“起来，起来”。斑比本想说“我站不起来，”但听到老鹿王话语中的命令和怜爱，斑比什么也没有说出口，有那么一刻，他甚至感觉疼痛消失了。

老鹿王焦急慌张地喊他：“起来，我的孩子！你必须离开这里！”“我的孩子！”当那句话从老鹿王嘴里说出时，斑比瞬间就站起来了。

“好样的！”老鹿王深吸了一口气，然后果断地说：“现在跟着我走，跟紧点。”

老鹿王敏捷地走在前面，斑比跟在他后面，可是斑比内心强烈渴望停下来，渴望就那么躺在地上休息。

老鹿王似乎看透了斑比的心思，他一刻不停地和斑比说话：“你现在必须忍受所有的疼痛，不能想着躺下来，一秒都不要往那边想，那样会耗尽你的力气。你必须自己救自己，明白吗？斑比，你要自己

救自己，否则你就完了。你要记住他就在你后面，明白吗？他不会对你手下留情。快，跟着我往前走，一会儿就没事了，你一定会好起来的。”

斑比没有力气思考，他每走一步就会引起一阵剧烈的疼痛。钻心的疼痛夺走了他的意识和呼吸，那股热流就像是内心深处挥之不去的梦魇一样，不仅灼烧他的左肩，还折磨着他的内心。

老鹿王带着斑比绕了一个很大的圈，耗费了好长一段时间。斑比一路受着疼痛和虚弱的煎熬，突然，他惊奇地发现他们又一次经过了那棵高大的橡树。

老鹿王停下来嗅闻空气，小声说道：“他还在这里，这是他，这是他的猎狗。咱们走，快点！”他们继续逃跑。

跑着跑着，老鹿王突然停下来，说：“看，那就是你刚刚躺下的地方。”

斑比望过去，看见那里有一片被压倒的青草，还有自己的那一摊正在往土壤里渗透的血。

老鹿王谨慎地嗅了嗅那个地方，说：“他们来过这里，他和他的猎狗。走吧！”他在前面慢慢走，一遍一遍地闻空气的味道。

斑比看见灌木丛的叶子上和青草的茎上都滴着红色的血滴，他心里想：“我们之前来过这里。”但是他没有力气开口说话。

“哈！”老鹿王说，好像很开心的样子，“现在我们在他们后面了。”

他沿着之前的路继续往前走了一会儿，没想到他又开始带着斑比绕圈了。斑比跟在他后面，跌跌撞撞地走着。他们再次来到了那棵橡树旁，但这次是往相反的方向走，然后又一次经过斑比倒地的那个地

方，和刚刚经过橡树一样，老鹿王依旧朝相反的方向走。

老鹿王突然停下来，把青草往两边扒开，指着两片靠近地面生长的深绿色短叶，命令斑比：“来，把那个吃了。”

斑比按照吩咐，吃下了那两片短小的叶子，只是这两片叶子苦得要命，也特别难闻。

过了一会儿，老鹿王问他：“现在感觉怎么样了？”

斑比突然就能说话了，他很快回答：“好多了。”他感觉自己的思维清晰了不少，也没那么累了。

老鹿王顿了一下，又命令道：“那我们继续走。”他带着斑比走了很长一段时间后，才开口说：“终于好了！”他们双双停下来。

老鹿王说：“血止住了，你的伤口已经不流血了，这样，身上的血就不会流尽，而且也不会暴露你的行踪了。只要不留下血迹，他和他的猎狗就不知道上哪里来找你，你也就不会死了。”

老鹿王看起来很是担忧，也很是疲惫，但是他的语气很欢快：“我们往这边走，你现在可以休息了。”

他们来到一道水渠前。这可真是一道宽大的水渠，斑比之前从没有蹚过这么宽的水面。老鹿王往下走，斑比也尽力跟着老鹿王的步伐。不过，远处那个陡峭的斜坡让斑比费了不少力气，他身上的伤口又开始剧烈地疼起来。他倒在地上，刚一站起来就又倒下去，躺在那里，嘴里喘着粗气。

“我帮不了你，”老鹿王说，“你必须自己站起来。”斑比的体力已经透支到了极限了，他感觉自己肩上的伤口又开始流血了，他的力气又在一点点地消失。

“你又流血了，”老鹿王说，“我也猜到了这点，不过好在流得并不多。”然后又小声地补充了一句：“你这会儿流血，不会有很大的影响。”

他们慢慢往前走，穿过一片高大的山毛榉树林，那里地面平坦，土壤松软，走在上面很轻松。斑比特别想就这么倒下去，然后伸展身体躺在那里，他不愿自己的四肢再动一下。他不能继续往前走了，脑袋开始疼起来，耳朵里嗡嗡直响，连勇气也在消减。他受到发烧的折磨，眼前变成一片黑暗。他的思绪处于游离状态，心里除了强烈的休息的渴望、游离于体外的惊愕感觉之外，什么都知道了。他惊愕是因为想到自己变成了这副糟糕模样，想到自己一生就此改变了。这一切发生在不到一小时之内，可他感觉就像是发生在久远的过去一样。

他们先后穿过一棵低矮的橡树和一片山茱萸，然后被一根山毛榉树干挡住了去路，那根树干中间是空心的，被低矮的树丛缠得密不透风。

斑比听见老鹿王说：“我们到了。”老鹿王沿着树干往前走，斑比在旁边跟着他，几乎就要跌进树干的中空部分。

这时，老鹿王说：“就是这里，你可以在这里躺下。”

斑比躺下去后，就再也不动了。

树干下面还有一个更深的洞，树干搭在上面，使这里变成了一个小小的密室。由于顶部被浓密的灌木丛遮盖得严严实实，所以不管是谁躺在里面，都不会被外面的人看见。

“你在这里很安全。”老鹿王说。

一日复一日，很多天过去了。

斑比躺在那块温热的土地上，抬头看见的就是树干上腐朽的深青

色树皮，他感觉自己的疼痛先是加强，然后又减弱，最后竟然一点点地消散了。

偶尔，斑比会走出洞，在外面站一会儿，只是他还很虚弱，不太站得稳。他也会走上几步，去找食物，他现在吃的植物都是之前没怎么见过的，不过那些陌生的植物现在很合他的胃口，他甚至还常常被它们散发出的苦药味吸引。在斑比眼里，之前被嫌弃的那些植物，不小心吃到都会吐出来的那些东西现在似乎都变成了美味。有好多小树叶和那种短小难看的嫩枝，斑比还是不喜欢，不过他现在也会吃它们，似乎是强迫自己吃，因为好像吃了那些叶子伤口会愈合得更快。他感觉身体一天比一天有力量了。

斑比的伤口已经痊愈了，但是他还没有离开那个地方。在夜晚，斑比会稍微四处走动，但是在白天，他一定会安静地躺着。直到身上的烧全退了，斑比才开始思考在自己身上发生了什么，他立刻感觉体内的恐惧复苏了，一股更可怕的恐惧感划过心间。他无法摆脱那份恐惧，这种时候，他也不能像以前一样站起来奔跑，只是安静地躺在那里，内心烦忧不堪。在梳理过去的那些事情时，他最开始感到害怕，然后觉得羞愧，接着惊奇不已，最后总是陷入苦恼中。有时候，他心里满是绝望，不过他也有十分开心的时候。

老鹿王一直陪伴着他。最开始，他日夜守在斑比身边。后来，他偶尔会让斑比单独安静地待着，尤其是当他看见斑比在沉思的时候。不过即使离开，他也总是待在离斑比很近的地方。

一天傍晚，落日西斜时，天空还很晴朗，但瞬间电闪雷鸣，大雨随即倾盆而下。动物们开始狂欢起来：近旁的树梢上，画眉鸟在大声歌唱；灌木丛中，小雀鸟在“呱呱呱呱”叫嚷，山雀在“叽叽喳喳”欢叫；在草地上和灌木丛的底部，野鸡不时大叫，发出沙哑的、金属般的声音；啄木鸟在哈哈大笑；还有鸽子不停咕咕地叫，像是在表达自己心中的热爱之情。

斑比从那个洞里走出来。生活太美好了。老鹿王已经站在那里了，好像他知道斑比一定会走出来一样。

老鹿王和斑比一起并肩向前漫步。

第二十二章

一个落叶纷飞的秋夜，夜空里无数声音在低语。突然，树丛间传来一声尖厉的叫声，是鸣角鸮在鸣叫，他叫完后就在那里等待着。

不过，斑比早已经透过稀疏的树枝看见鸣角鸮了，他停下脚步来。

鸣角鸮见斑比没有反应，便飞到离斑比更近的地方，发出一声更加尖厉的叫喊，然后继续等待，可是斑比还是什么都没有说。

鸣角鸮等不下去了，他不愉快地问道：“难道你没有被我吓着吗？”

“哦，”斑比回答，“有一点。”

“是吗？”鸣角鸮不太高兴，生气地说，“只是有一点？你以前都会被吓得很惨，以前看到你害怕的反应，我就会开心，可是现在你怎么就只有一点害怕啊。”他说着说着，更加生气了，不断重复说：“怎么只有一点！”

鸣角鸮变老了，这也是他比以前显得更加自负、更加敏感的原因。

斑比本来想这么回答：“我以前也没有害怕过。”但是看着鸣角鸮坐在那里生气，斑比感到很抱歉，他决定不把真相说出来。为了安慰鸣角鸮，斑比说：“可能是因为我刚刚在想你。”

“什么？”鸣角鸮说，他又开心了，“你真的在想我？”

“是的。”斑比略带迟疑地回答他，“我正想着你，就听见你叫了。”

要不然，我肯定会和以前一样害怕的。”

“真的啊？”

斑比不想去否认，再说即使说出真相，又会怎么样呢？就让这个老家伙自娱自乐吧。

为了让鸣角鸮相信自己，斑比说：“真的，我很开心，突然听见你的声音，我的身体都有一种电击的快感。”

听见斑比这么说，鸣角鸮开心极了，他抖抖羽毛，变成一个毛茸茸的、灰褐色的圆球。“你能想我，这真是不错啊，真是不错！”他的声音温柔了不少，“我好长时间没有看见你了。”

“是好长时间了。”斑比说。

“你不再走之前的小径了，是吗？”鸣角鸮问。

“对，”斑比缓缓说，“我已经不再走以前的小径了。”

“比起之前，我的眼界也开阔了不少。”鸣角鸮显摆道，他没有提及自己被年轻的竞争对手赶出祖传栖息地一事，只是接着说：“你不可能永远待在一个地方。”说完就等着斑比答复。

但是斑比早就走远了，他现在差不多已经掌握了老鹿王来去无声的本领。

鸣角鸮完全被激怒了，他自言自语道：“可耻的……”他摇了摇自己的羽毛，嘴巴缩到胸脯前，像个哲学家一样思考着：“永远不要认为你能和这些大家伙当朋友，他们平日里倒是对你和善友好，可到了某些时候，他们才不会为你考虑，拍拍屁股就走了，就剩你自己傻傻留在原地，就像我现在这个样子……”

突然，鸣角鸮像石头一样往地面坠去，原来是他看见了一只老

鼠。老鼠在敌人爪下扑腾了一下，就被盛怒之中的鸣角鸮撕成了碎片。鸣角鸮三下两口把老鼠吞下了肚子，然后就飞走了。“你们那些大家伙，都以为自己是誰啊？”他说，“对我来说，什么都不是。”他又开始扯开尖厉的嗓子不停地大声叫。经过林鸽窝时，他大声尖叫，惊醒了一对睡梦中的鸽子，吓得鸽子用力扑闪翅膀逃跑了。

大暴雨连着下了几天，把枝头最后几片树叶都冲刷掉了，所有的树木都变成光秃秃的了。灰色的晨曦中，斑比正往家赶，他要回到那块空地，和老鹿王一起睡觉。

在路上，斑比听见有个尖锐的声音在叫自己，还连着叫了两声。他停下脚步，然后看见树上一只松鼠一路奔跑下来，眨眼就来到地面，坐在斑比面前。

“真的是你吗？”松鼠尖声说，感到又高兴又惊讶。

“你从我身边走过的时候，我就认出你来了，不过，我真不敢相信……”

“你从哪里来的？”斑比问。

松鼠本来笑脸盈盈，听斑比这么一问，一下变成了苦瓜脸，他悲伤地说：“橡树没了，我美丽的老橡树，你还记得它吗？太难受了！是他砍掉的。”

听见这一噩耗，斑比难过地低下头，为那棵古老美丽的橡树感到可惜。

“当时，”松鼠讲述道，“住在树上的所有小动物都逃走了，然后看着他用巨大的牙齿咬树干，那牙齿还闪闪发光。受伤的树干发出哀怨的吱嘎声，那牙齿一直咬，橡树就一直哀声呻吟。我们听着特别难受，等到那可怜的树倒在草地上，大家都哭了。”

斑比听了，难过得说不出话来。

“真的，”松鼠叹息说：“他什么都会，他无所不能。”他睁着大大的眼睛看着斑比，还指了指他的耳朵，不过斑比还是一言不发。

“后来我们都无家可归了。”松鼠继续说，“不知道其他动物们都去了哪里，我就搬到这里来了，不过一时半会儿，我是真找不到像那棵橡树那么好的树了。”

“那棵老橡树，”斑比自言自语道，“当我还是个孩子时，我就认识它了。”

“哦，是的，”松鼠说，“不过说真的，你才是神奇。”他兴高采烈地往下说：“大伙都说你早就死了，当然，偶尔也有一些动物说你还活着。有时候，有的动物说他们看见过你，但谁也不知道具体情况，我以为他们是在瞎说，”松鼠好奇地盯着斑比，“主要是后来你一直没有回来过。”

斑比看出来松鼠很好奇，还看出来他和自己对话就是为了找寻答案。

斑比没有说话，但是他心里也萌生了强烈的好奇心，他想问问费琳的情况，还有埃娜阿姨、罗奥和卡鲁斯，以及他童年那些伙伴，不过他还是什么也没有说。

那只松鼠还坐在斑比的面前观察他。“啧啧！看这鹿角！”他满怀崇拜地说，“多棒的鹿角啊！整个森林里，除了老鹿王，都找不出谁拥有这样的鹿角了。”

要是在以前听到这样的褒奖，斑比肯定会感到高兴和荣幸，但是此刻他只是淡淡地说：“可能吧。”

松鼠快速地点了点头。“真的，”说着他惊讶起来，“你的鹿角快变

成灰色的了。”

斑比起身准备继续漫步。

松鼠知道这次谈话算是结束了，他穿过灌木丛，跳到树上。“再见，”他向下方大声喊，“保重！见到你我很高兴。要是看见你的熟人朋友，我就告诉他们你还活着，他们都会很高兴的。”

听见松鼠最后说的话，斑比又感觉到心里的那股冲动在奔涌，但是他什么也没有说。在斑比很小的时候，老鹿王就告诫他必须学会孤独地生活。在那以后，老鹿王向他展示了更多的智慧，也为他揭开了更多的秘密的面纱，但是在老鹿王的全部教导中，最重要的还是最初那一课：你必须孤独地活着。如果你想保护自己，如果你想懂得生活，如果你想获得智慧，你都得孤独地活着。

“可是，”斑比有一次反驳道，“我们俩现在不是经常在一起吗？”

“这不会持续很久。”老鹿王很快回答他。那是几个星期以前的事了，此刻斑比想起了这件事，甚至还想起老鹿王最开始对他说的关于“孤独”的那些话。那一天，还是个孩子的斑比到处找妈妈，老鹿王出现在他面前，问他：“难道你不能独自生活吗？”

斑比向前走去。

第二十三章

大雪再次来袭，整个森林静静地躺在厚厚的雪毯下。四下里安安静静，只能听见乌鸦在叫，偶尔也会传来几声喜鹊的喧闹，还有山雀胆小的叽喳声。紧接着一场霜冻降临，世界又变得寂静无声了，空气中充满了刺骨的寒意。

这天早上，一声接一声的犬吠刺破了森林里的宁静。

林间回荡着一只狗的洪亮叫声，它一直不断地叫，声音急促、清晰，而且越来越近。

山毛榉树干下，斑比还安静地躺在那个洞里，他抬起头看了看睡在旁边的老鹿王。

“没事儿，”老鹿王回应斑比的目光，说，“咱们根本不用为这点声音担心。”

但是，他们还是竖起耳朵听着外面。

斑比和老鹿王躺在洞里，洞口上方的山毛榉树干就像遮风避雨的屋顶一样，厚雪阻挡了寒冷气流的入侵，密密麻麻的灌木丛防止了来自外界的窥视。

犬吠声愈发靠近了。那无情、愤怒的、不间断的咆哮声像是一只猎狗发出的。声音越来越近了。

随后，大家听见另外一种喘息声，在那愤怒的咆哮声之外，还有一个低沉的、吃力的喘息声。斑比感到很不安，但是老鹿王再次让安慰他，说：“我们没必要担心。”他们就躺在温暖的洞里，往洞外看发生了什么。

林间的脚步声越来越近了。白雪从摇晃的干树枝上掉落下来，地面上也雪屑四起。

雪地里，一只狐狸连滚带爬地往前跑，跑过无数棵树，跃过无数树枝。一只短腿小猎狗在后面追那只狐狸。大家都猜对了，刚才真是一只猎狗在叫。

狐狸的一只前脚已经受伤了，伤口处的皮毛往外翻。他把那条受伤的腿举到面前时，鲜血直往外流。他大口喘着气，眼里写满了恐惧和无能为力。他极度生气，也极度害怕。他绝望了，也筋疲力尽了。

偶尔，他会转过头朝猎狗咆哮两声，这样猎狗就会被吓得后退几步。

过了一会儿，狐狸一屁股坐在雪地上，他已经跑不动了。他可怜兮兮地举起受伤的前爪，张开嘴巴，对着猎狗咆哮。

但是猎狗一秒也没有安静下来，那令人焦躁的高叫声反而变得更加饱满，更加深沉。“这里，”他在那里狂吠，“他在这里！这儿！这儿！”他没有辱骂狐狸，甚至都没有和他说话，只是一个劲地催促后面。

和老鹿王一样，斑比也明白过来猎狗是在呼唤他。

狐狸也知道猎狗叫的是他。鲜血从伤口流出来，流到他胸口，然后又滑落下去，白色的雪地里赫然出现一个红艳艳的点，还缓缓冒着些许热气。

狐狸被虚弱打败了，那条受伤的腿无望地垂下去，可刚一接触冰冷的雪地，他就感受到了一阵剧烈的疼痛。他只好又努力举起那条腿，可怜的残腿在他前面不住地颤抖。

“放我走吧，”狐狸开口说话，“放我走吧。”他低声恳求猎狗。他

太虚弱了，也十分沮丧。

“不！不！不！”猎狗狂喊。

狐狸更加急切地乞求他，他说：“我们是亲戚，都能称得上是兄弟了，你就放我回家吧。至少让我和我的家人一起死去。你和我都算是兄弟啊！”

“不！不！不！”猎狗怒吼道。

这时，狐狸起身，然后笔直地坐着，英俊的面庞垂到流血的胸前。他睁开双眼直勾勾地看着猎狗，一改之前乞求的口吻，强忍着怨恨，对着猎狗一阵怒吼：“你这个叛徒！难道你不为自己感到害臊吗？”

“不！不！不！”猎狗大叫。

狐狸继续说：“你是一个叛徒！你是内奸！”他那受伤的身体充满着对猎狗的鄙夷和怨恨。“你是间谍，”他啐道，“走狗！要不是你跟踪我们，他永远找不到我们。你背叛了我们，你背叛了你自己的亲戚，背叛了和你称得上是兄弟的我，你现在竟然还恬不知耻地站在这里！”

就在这时，四周传来许多响亮的声音。

“叛徒！”树上的喜鹊大声叫道。

“间谍！”松鸦尖声说。

“走狗！”鼯鼠发出一阵嘘声。

“内奸！”雪貂怒声骂。

每一棵树上，每一丛灌木丛里都响起一片叽喳声、啾啾声和其他

尖锐的声音，甚至在空中也有乌鸦在叫：“间谍！间谍！”大家都从自己的安乐窝中跑出来观看这场斗争，有的从树上冒出来，有的从地面上钻出来。狐狸的愤怒引起了大家的共鸣，激起了大家心中对猎狗的怨恨。看着狐狸的鲜血一滴滴掉落在雪地里，所有的动物都被激怒了，以至于忘记了所有警惕。

猎狗瞪着狐狸狂叫：“你们是谁呀？你们想怎么样？你们知道什么？你们在胡扯什么啊？一切都是属于他的，我也属于他，只不过我爱他，崇拜他，我为他服务。你们认为你们可以和他作对吗？就凭你们这些可怜虫？他无所不能，比你们任何一个都厉害，我们的一切都来自于他，所有地里生长的，还有生活在这里的，全都是他的。”猎狗说着激动得颤抖起来。

“叛徒！”松鼠尖声大叫。

“对，叛徒！”狐狸发出嘘声，“你就是叛徒，就只有你才是叛徒。”

猎狗暴跳如雷，大声说：“就只有我吗？你说谎。站在他那边的不是还有很多其他动物吗？马、奶牛、羊、鸡……还有很多很多你们的同类，他们也在他那里，他们也崇拜他，为他服务。”

“都是些乌合之众！”狐狸的话语里表露出深深的鄙夷。

猎狗再也不能控制自己，他冲过去咬住狐狸的喉咙。雪地里，两个身影咬作一团，互相扭打、谩骂着，只见雪屑四起，皮毛乱飞，鲜血溅开。最后，狐狸败下阵来。几秒钟后，他就仰面倒下去了，雪白的肚子正对着天际，身体抽搐了两下，然后就僵在那里，死了。

猎狗踢了狐狸几脚，任由狐狸倒在被践踏过的雪地里。他四腿蹬开，稳稳地站在狐狸旁边，高声叫起来：“这边，这边！他在这边！”

其他动物瞬间感到陷入恐惧，各自四散逃去。

“真可怕。”在洞里，斑比轻声对老鹿王说。

老鹿王说：“最可怕的是那些狗都相信猎狗说的话，他们相信这些话。他们一生都活在恐惧中，他们恨他，也恨自己，可他们却为了他的利益而互相残杀。”

第二十四章

依然是冬季，但寒冷已经远去，天气开始暖和起来。大地上，大面积的冰雪都融化了，到处都能看见土壤。画眉鸟还没有开始歌唱，但当他们在地面找完虫子，飞起来时，或者从一棵树飞到另一棵树时，他们就会发出快乐的哨音，那拉长的哨音像极了一首歌。啄木鸟开始不时地敲击树干，发出“笃笃笃”的声音，喜鹊和乌鸦更加健谈，山雀叫得更欢，还有野鸡，他们从自己的窝里“噌”地俯冲下来，一边用嘴整理羽毛，一边发出低沉洪亮而又刺耳的“嘎嘎”声。

这天早上，斑比和往常一样在森林里漫步。在晨曦中，他走到一条河沟边。这时，他看见在远处——他曾住过的地方，有一个身影在晃动。斑比躲在灌木丛里，向那边望去。那是一只觅食的鹿，那只鹿来回走，是在寻找冰雪融化的地面，只要看见哪里有草冒出来，不管是什么草，那只鹿都会俯身吃掉。

斑比想立刻转身离开，因为他认出来那只鹿就是费琳。在认出那是费琳后，斑比的第一个念头是跑过去叫她，但是他并没有挪步，反而犹如脚下生根般站在原地。他已经很长时间没有见过费琳了。他的心跳得更快了。费琳慢慢移动着，看起来似乎很伤心，也很疲惫。她现在和她的妈妈长得很像。斑比发现费琳看起来和埃娜阿姨一样老了，他又吃惊，又难受。

这时，费琳似乎感知到了斑比的存在，她抬起头望向对面。斑比又开始往那边走，但是他停了下来，他心里犹豫了，一步也不能迈出去。

他看见费琳变年老了，也变苍白了。

“快乐、活泼的小费琳，她过去是多么可爱啊！”斑比心里想，“而

且那么有活力！”整个青春在斑比眼前一晃而过：草地，和妈妈一起走过的小径，和戈博、费琳一起玩过的游戏，友好的蚱蜢和蝴蝶，还有为了赢得费琳和卡鲁斯、罗奥的激烈搏斗。想到这些，斑比再次感觉到幸福，可又止不住地颤抖起来。

费琳已经向前走了，她低下头，疲倦地往前走，脚步很缓慢，看起来十分悲伤。在那一刻，斑比心里重燃起对费琳的爱，那是一份无法抵挡的、温柔的，却又带着无限哀伤的爱。他想跨过这条把他俩隔开的河沟，他想追上费琳，想和她说话，想和她聊聊他们的青春，想和她讲讲都发生了什么。

他的目光一直追随远去的费琳，看着她穿过光秃秃的树林，直到她消失不见。

他还是站在那里，久久地望着费琳消失的方向。

之后，树林里突然爆发出一声轰然巨响，斑比不由地缩成一团。那声音离他几乎没什么距离，就是从他所站的地方发出来的，就响在他的耳畔。

紧接着，又是一声雷鸣巨响，然后又是一声。

斑比退回灌木丛深处，站在那里聆听。一切都变得安静了，斑比悄悄地往自己住的那个洞走去。

回到家时，斑比发现老鹿王还没有躺下。老鹿王就站在斑比面前，靠近那根倒下的山毛榉树干，似乎在等着斑比回来。

“你到哪里了？怎么这么久？”老鹿王问。他的语气特别严厉，以至于斑比都不敢说话。

老鹿王等了一会儿，又开始问：“你没听见我问你话吗？”

“嗯，”斑比回答，“响了三声，他一定在森林里。”

“当然了，”老鹿王点了点头，然后又用罕见的语调说，“他在森林里，我们必须过去。”

“去哪儿？”斑比脱口而出。

“现在他在哪里，我们就去哪里。”老鹿王回答，他的声音变得很严肃。

斑比听老鹿王这么说，十分惊恐。

“不要怕，”老鹿王继续说道，“跟我来，不要害怕。我很高兴能够带你去，给你看看……”他犹豫了一下，然后缓慢地说，“在我离开这个世界之前。”

斑比吃惊地看着老鹿王，他忽然发现老鹿王看起来那么苍老：整个头都已经完全变成白色，面容枯槁，眼里再也没有深邃的目光，取而代之的是暗淡无光的灰色，看起来就像是一个瞎子。

斑比和老鹿王向前没走多远，他们就闻见了令人心生恐惧的刺鼻气味。

斑比停下脚步，但是老鹿王却径直朝散发气味的方向走过去，斑比迟疑了一下，也跟了上去。

那股令人恐惧的气味越来越浓，但老鹿王还是一直向前走。斑比的脑子里冒出逃跑的念头，这想法一直萦绕他心间，在他体内翻滚，让他心神不安，不过，他牢牢控制住自己，紧紧跟在老鹿王后面。

他们继续往前走，那股可怕的气味变得更加强烈，几乎盖过了所有一切的味道，简直令人窒息。

“他就在这里。”老鹿王边说边走到一边。

斑比透过光秃的树枝间的缝隙，看见他躺在几步之外被践踏过的雪地里。

一阵无法抗拒的恐惧席卷斑比全身，他突然向外跨出一步，准备屈服于心中逃跑的冲动。

“站住！”听见老鹿王叫他，斑比回头看见老鹿王镇定地站在他躺着的地方。斑比很是吃惊，然后带着顺从、无限的好奇心以及颤抖的期待走了过去。

“走近点，”老鹿王说，“不要怕。”

他躺在那里，一张苍白无毛的脸上仰着，他的帽子就落在旁边不远处的雪地里——斑比不知道帽子是何物，还以为他那可怕的头裂成了两半——他的敞领衬衫被刺透了，脖子上裂了一个像红色嘴巴一样的口，鲜血正慢慢地往外流，而他鼻子和头发上的血已经凝固了，还有一大摊热血流到地面上，血的温度使得雪都融化了。

“我们可以站在他旁边，”老鹿王温和地开口说，“而且这一点也不危险。”

斑比低头看那具了无生气的身体，他觉得他的四肢和外皮很神秘，也很可怕，他盯着他那死气沉沉的眼睛，他的眼睛就这样无力地望着斑比。斑比不知道怎么理解眼前的一切。

“斑比，”老鹿王继续说，“你还记得戈博和猎狗说的，还有他们怎么想的吗？你还记得吗？”

斑比并没有回答。

“你看见了吗？斑比，”老鹿王说，“他死了，现在就这样躺在这里，和我们大家一样，你看见了吗？听着，斑比，他并不像他们说的那样无所不能，在这里生活的动物和在这里生长的植物不是来自于

他，他并不在我们之上，他和我们一模一样。和我们一样，他也有恐惧、困难和痛苦。和我们一样，他也可能被杀死，然后像我们所有动物一样，无助地躺在地上，正如你眼前看见的这样。”

老鹿王说完后，谁也没说话，安静了好一会儿。

“斑比，你明白了吗？”老鹿王后来问。

“可我觉得……”斑比低声说。

“你说吧。”老鹿王指示道。

斑比受到老鹿王的鼓励，颤抖着说：“在我们之上，有另外一个存在，不仅在我们之上，也在他之上。”

“现在，我可以走了。”老鹿王说。

他转过身，和斑比肩并肩往前走。

过了一会儿，老鹿王在一棵高大的橡树前停下来，他用无比郑重的语气对斑比说：“斑比，不要再跟着我了，我的时间到了，现在我得去找一个安息之地。”

斑比正要开口说话。

“不，”老鹿王打断他，“不要说，等到我的临终时刻来临，我们都将是孤独的。再见了，我的孩子，我深爱着你。”

第二十五章

夏日已经降临这座森林。黎明时分，天气燥热无比，没有一丝风，也没有往日清晨的凉意。太阳很快就升起来了，似乎比平日迅速多了，像个大火炬一样挂在天空，射出耀眼的光芒。

草地上和灌木丛上的露珠一瞬间就被烤干了，土壤干得不得了，有些地面的土块都龟裂了。从很早开始，森林就被宁静笼罩着，只有啄木鸟偶尔在“笃笃笃”地啄树，还有鸽子在“咕咕咕”地表达他们心中无穷的热爱。

灌木丛中央有一小块空地，斑比就站在这狭窄的林间空地前。

温暖的阳光下，一群蚊子围着斑比的头飞舞，发出“嗡嗡嗡”的声音。

斑比的近旁是一片榛树丛，榛树丛的树叶间也传来低沉的“嗡嗡”声，那是一只大金龟子发出的声音。金龟子从树丛间爬出来，缓缓地飞走了。他飞到蚊子中间，一直往上飞，直到飞到树梢处。他打算夜里睡在那里，他熟练地折起翅鞘，有力地振动双翼。

金龟子飞过时，蚊子纷纷散开给他让路，等他飞走，所有蚊子又都合拢来。在阳光下，金龟子身上呼呼拍打的翅膀闪着晶莹透明的光芒，棕黑色的身体在空中闪了一下就过去了。

“你看见他了吗？”蚊子互相问。

“那是老金龟子。”一些蚊子“嗡嗡”作答。

另外一些说：“他的后代都死掉了，只有他一个还活着，只有一个。”

“他还能活多久？”一些蚊子开口问。

其他蚊子说：“我们不知道，他有些后代活了很长的时间，感觉就像永远一样长……他们看见太阳升起了三十到四十次，我们也不知道具体是多少次。我们的生命已经足够长了，可我们只能看见一两次黎明。”

“那老金龟子活了多久了呢？”一些年幼的蚊子问。

“他比他整个家族的其他成员都活得久，他和那些小山一样古老，和小山一样古老啊。他在这个世界上所看见的和所经历的事情，多得完全超出了我们的想象。”

斑比往前走。“蚊子之见，”他心里想，“真是蚊子之见。”

这时，一声轻柔而又充满恐惧的呼唤声传入斑比的耳朵。

他听着那声音，然后一步步向那个声音靠近。他身处在最密的灌木丛中，但是没有弄出一丝声响，就像他很早之前就学会的那样。他悄无声息地往那个方向移动。

呼唤声再次传来：“妈妈！妈妈！”这次显得更加焦急，更加哀伤，原来是一只小鹿在悲伤地呼唤妈妈。

斑比在灌木丛中穿梭，循着声音找过去。

然后，他看见这一幕：两只身着小红外套的小鹿，一只小公鹿，一只小母鹿，他们神情沮丧，孤独凄凉地肩并肩站着。

“妈妈！妈妈！”他们呼唤道。

在两只小鹿意识到发生了什么之前，斑比已经站在他俩面前。两只小鹿盯着斑比，惊得说不出话来。

“你们的妈妈现在没有时间照顾你们。”斑比严肃地说。

他看着小公鹿的眼睛，说：“难道你不能独自生活吗？”

两只小鹿没有说话。

斑比转身走进灌木丛，两只小鹿还没有明白发生了什么，斑比就消失不见了。

“我很喜欢这只小公鹿，”他想，“等他长大一点，也许我还会见他……”

他往前走。“小母鹿也很可爱，”他心里想，“费琳小时候看起来也是这样可爱。”

斑比向前走，慢慢的，消失在了森林里。

译后记

“难道你不能独自生活吗？”

做翻译时，每每读到这句话，脑海里就会浮现出许多画面……

年幼时，父母忙于农活，把我锁在家中，小小的我透过堂屋木门夹缝，望向远方的翠山、近处稻谷抽穗后的田地，还有路上来往的三两邻居。记忆中，天气总是很好，所有的景象都被明亮、金黄的阳光笼罩着，我就用三四岁孩童的稚嫩眼光，静静观察门外的世界。

再有，就是翻译此书时的画面。窗边的书桌上摆满书稿，而窗外是一条大路，路边一溜的餐馆。早上五点，卤肉馆的肉香就飘散在空气里，偶尔还有别人家炒炼花椒油的味道，钻进鼻子里，酥酥麻麻的。晴天时，街面熙熙攘攘，声响不断：叫卖声、吆喝声、说笑声、狗儿欢叫声……雨天里，整个世界一片清静，只有落雨声。

……

我常觉得，“孤独”是自然赋予每一个生灵的特性。是的，不只是人，书中的每一个小动物，长在这世间的每一棵树，每一朵含苞待放的花……他们都是独自存活着，都是孤独的。也许有的故事从未被诉说，也许森林里大树的英姿和野花的芬芳从未为人知晓，但每一个独自生存的生灵都会绽放属于自己的精彩，他们默默生长着，生活着。

关于“孤独”或者“成长”，古今中外，有许多名篇佳作，但我依旧深信：《小鹿斑比》是一个不容错过的好故事。它讲述了一只小鹿从刚出生一直到长大、成熟的生命历程，其中包括亲情、爱情、友情等等，每一个看似简单的情节都意蕴深长。什么是危险，什么是爱，什么是坚强，什么是勇敢，什么是孤独……如果你翻开此书，跟着斑比

一起面对，一起忍受，一起思考，一起成长，相信你一定会从中找到答案。如果把这个故事念给你的孩子听，斑比的经历也许会在他或她的心灵上留下深刻的印象，也许今日的孩童，就会在日后漫漫的人生路上勇敢成长，不怕困难，不畏孤独。

期待每一位打开这本书的读者，都能从这个不算完美，但凝结了译者和编辑心血的译本里，感受到书中的爱与孤独，也感受到自己生命中的一切美好，享受爱与孤独。

虞凤文

一四年八月

于加拿大渥太华

BAMBI: A LIFE IN THE WOODS

Felix Salten

For Kate, my love

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CHAPTER I

He came into the world in the middle of the thicket, in one of those little, hidden forest glades which seem to be entirely open but are really screened in on all sides. There was very little room in it, scarcely enough for him and his mother.

He stood there, swaying unsteadily on his thin legs and staring vaguely in front of him with clouded eyes which saw nothing. He hung his head, trembled a great deal, and was still completely stunned.

“What a beautiful child,” cried the magpie.

She had flown past, attracted by the deep groans the mother uttered in her labor. The magpie perched on a neighboring branch. “What a beautiful child,” she kept repeating. Receiving no answer, she went on talkatively, “How amazing to think that he should be able to get right up and walk! How interesting! I've never seen the like of it before in all my born days. Of course, I'm still young, only a year out of the nest you might say. But I think it's wonderful. A child like that, hardly a minute in this world, and beginning to walk already! I call that remarkable. Really, I find that everything you deer do is remarkable. Can he run, too?”

“Of course,” replied the mother softly. “But you must pardon me if I don't talk with you now. I have so much to do, and I still feel a little faint.”

“Don't put yourself out on my account,” said the magpie. “I

have very little time myself. But you don't see a sight like this every day. Think what a care and bother such things mean to us. The children can't stir once they are out of the egg but lie helpless in the nest and require an attention, an attention, I repeat, of which you simply can't have any comprehension. What a labor it is to feed them, what a trouble to watch them. Just think for a moment what a strain it is to hunt food for the children and to have to be eternally on guard lest something happen to them. They are helpless if you are not with them. Isn't it the truth? And how long it is before they can move, how long it is before they get their feathers and look like anything at all."

"Pardon," replied the mother, "I wasn't listening."

The magpie flew off. "A stupid soul," she thought to herself, "very nice, but stupid."

The mother scarcely noticed that she was gone. She continued zealously washing her newly-born. She washed him with her tongue, fondling and caressing his body in a sort of warm massage.

The slight thing staggered a little. Under the strokes of her tongue, which softly touched him here and there, he drew himself together and stood still. His little red coat, that was still somewhat tousled, bore fine white spots, and on his vague baby face there was still a deep, sleepy expression.

Round about grew hazel bushes, dogwoods, black-thorns and young elders. Tall maples, beeches and oaks wove a green roof over the thicket and from the firm, dark-brown earth sprang fern fronds, wood-vetch and sage. Underneath, the leaves of the violets, which

had already bloomed, and of the strawberries, which were just beginning, clung to the ground. Through the thick foliage, the early sunlight filtered in a golden web. The whole forest resounded with myriad voices, was penetrated by them in a joyous agitation. The wood-thrush rejoiced incessantly, the doves cooed without stopping, the blackbirds whistled, finches warbled, the titmice chirped. Through the midst of these songs the jay flew, uttering its quarrelsome cry, the magpie mocked them, and the pheasants cackled loud and high. At times the shrill exulting of a woodpecker rose above all the other voices. The call of the falcon shrilled, light and piercing, over the tree-tops, and the hoarse crow chorus was heard continuously.

The little fawn understood not one of the many songs and calls, not a word of the conversations. He did not even listen to them. Nor did he heed any of the odors which blew through the woods. He heard only the soft licking against his coat that washed him and warmed him and kissed him. And he smelled nothing but his mother's body near him. She smelled good to him and, snuggling closer to her, he hunted eagerly around and found nourishment for his life.

While he suckled, the mother continued to caress her little one. "Bambi," she whispered. Every little while she raised her head and, listening, snuffed the wind. Then she kissed her fawn again, reassured and happy.

"Bambi," she repeated. "My little Bambi."

CHAPTER II

In early summer the trees stood still under the blue sky, held their limbs outstretched and received the direct rays of the sun. On the shrubs and bushes in the undergrowth, the flowers unfolded their red, white and yellow stars. On some the seed pods had begun to appear again. They perched innumerable on the fine tips of the branches, tender and firm and resolute, and seemed like small, clenched fists. Out of the earth came whole troops of flowers, like motley stars, so that the soil of the twilight forest floor shone with a silent, ardent, colorful gladness. Everything smelled of fresh leaves, of blossoms, of moist clods and green wood. When morning broke, or when the sun went down, the whole woods resounded with a thousand voices, and from morning till night, the bees hummed, the wasps droned, and filled the fragrant stillness with their murmur.

These were the earliest days of Bambi's life. He walked behind his mother on a narrow track that ran through the midst of the bushes. How pleasant it was to walk there. The thick foliage stroked his flanks softly and bent supplely aside. The track appeared to be barred and obstructed in a dozen places, and yet they advanced with the greatest ease. There were tracks like this everywhere, running crisscross through the whole woods. His mother knew them all, and if Bambi sometimes stopped before a bush as if it were an impenetrable green wall, she always found where the path went through, without hesitation or searching.

Bambi questioned her. He loved to ask his mother questions. It was the pleasantest thing for him to ask a question and then to hear

what answer his mother would give. Bambi was never surprised that question after question should come into his mind continually and without effort. He found it perfectly natural, and it delighted him very much. It was very delightful, too, to wait expectantly till the answer came. If it turned out the way he wanted, he was satisfied. Sometimes, of course, he did not understand, but that was pleasant also because he was kept busy picturing what he had not understood, in his own way. Sometimes he felt very sure that his mother was not giving him a complete answer, was intentionally not telling him all she knew. And at first, that was very pleasant, too. For then there would remain in him such a lively curiosity, such suspicion, mysteriously and joyously flashing through him, such anticipation, that he would become anxious and happy at the same time, and grow silent.

Once he asked, "Whom does this trail belong to, Mother?"

His mother answered, "To us."

Bambi asked again, "To you and me?"

"Yes."

"To us two?"

"Yes."

"Only to us two?"

"No," said his mother, "to us deer."

"What are deer?" Bambi asked, and laughed.

His mother looked at him from head to foot and laughed too. "You are a deer and I am a deer. We're both deer," she said. "Do you understand?"

Bambi sprang into the air for joy. "Yes, I understand," he said. "I'm a little deer and you're a big deer, aren't you?"

His mother nodded and said, "Now you see."

But Bambi grew serious again. "Are there other deer besides you and me?" he asked.

"Certainly," his mother said. "Many of them."

"Where are they?" cried Bambi.

"Here, everywhere."

"But I don't see them."

"You will soon," she said.

"When?" Bambi stood still, wild with curiosity.

"Soon." The mother walked on quietly. Bambi followed her. He kept silent for he was wondering what "soon" might mean. He came to the conclusion that "soon" was certainly not "now". But he wasn't sure at what time "soon" stopped being "soon" and began to be a "long while". Suddenly he asked, "Who made this trail?"

"We," his mother answered.

Bambi was astonished. "We? You and I?"

The mother said, "Well, we... we deer."

Bambi asked, "Which deer?"

"All of us," his mother said sharply.

They walked on. Bambi was in high spirits and felt like leaping off the path, but he stayed close to his mother. Something rustled in front of them, close to the ground. The fern fronds and wood-lettuce concealed something that advanced in violent motion. A threadlike little cry shrilled out piteously; then all was still. Only the leaves and the blades of grass shivered back into place. A ferret had caught a mouse. He came slinking by, slid sideways, and prepared to enjoy his meal.

"What was that?" asked Bambi excitedly.

"Nothing," his mother soothed him.

"But," Bambi trembled, "but I saw it."

"Yes, yes," said his mother. "Don't be frightened. The ferret has killed a mouse." But Bambi was dreadfully frightened. A vast, unknown horror clutched at his heart. It was long before he could speak again. Then he asked, "Why did he kill the mouse?"

"Because—" his mother hesitated. "Let us walk faster," she said, as though something had just occurred to her and as though she had forgotten the question. She began to hurry. Bambi sprang after her.

A long pause ensued. They walked on quietly again. Finally Bambi asked anxiously, "Shall we kill a mouse, too, sometime?"

“No,” replied his mother.

“Never?” asked Bambi.

“Never,” came the answer.

“Why not?” asked Bambi, relieved.

“Because we never kill anything,” said his mother simply.

Bambi grew happy again.

Loud cries were coming from a young ash tree which stood near their path. The mother went along without noticing them, but Bambi stopped inquisitively. Overhead two jays were quarreling about a nest they had plundered.

“Get away, you murderer!” cried one.

“Keep cool, you fool,” the other answered, “I’m not afraid of you.”

“Look for your own nests,” the first one shouted, “or I’ll break your head for you.” He was beside himself with rage. “What vulgarity!” he chattered. “What vulgarity!”

The other jay had spied Bambi and fluttered down a few branches to shout at him. “What are you gawking at, you freak?” he screamed.

Bambi sprang away, terrified. He reached his mother and walked behind her again, frightened and obedient, thinking she had not noticed his absence.

After a pause he asked, "Mother, what is vulgarity?"

"I don't know," said his mother.

Bambi thought a while; then he began again. "Why were they both so angry with each other, Mother?" he asked.

"They were fighting over food," his mother answered.

"Will we fight over food, too, sometime?" Bambi asked.

"No," said his mother.

Bambi asked, "Why not?"

"Because there is enough for all of us," his mother replied.

Bambi wanted to know something else. "Mother," he began.

"What is it?"

"Will we be angry with each other sometime?" he asked.

"No, child," said his mother, "we don't do such things."

They walked along again. Presently it grew light ahead of them. It grew very bright. The trail ended with the tangle of vines and bushes. A few steps more and they would be in the bright open space that spread out before them. Bambi wanted to bound forward, but his mother had stopped.

"What is it?" he asked impatiently, already delighted.

"It's the meadow," his mother answered.

“What is a meadow?” asked Bambi insistently.

His mother cut him short. “You’ll soon find out for yourself,” she said. She had become very serious and watchful. She stood motionless, holding her head high and listening intently. She sucked in deep breathfuls of air and looked very severe.

“It’s all right,” she said at last, “we can go out.”

Bambi leaped forward, but his mother barred the way.

“Wait till I call you,” she said. Bambi obeyed at once and stood still. “That’s right,” said his mother, to encourage him, “and now listen to what I am saying to you.” Bambi heard how seriously his mother spoke and felt terribly excited.

“Walking on the meadow is not so simple,” his mother went on. “It’s a difficult and dangerous business. Don’t ask me why. You’ll find that out later on. Now do exactly as I tell you to. Will you?”

“Yes,” Bambi promised.

“Good,” said his mother, “I’m going out alone first. Stay here and wait. And don’t take your eyes off me for a minute. If you see me run back here, then turn round and run as fast as you can. I’ll catch up with you soon.” She grew silent and seemed to be thinking. Then she went on earnestly, “Run away as fast as your legs will carry you. Run even if something should happen... even if you should see me fall to the ground.... Don’t think of me, do you understand? No matter what you see or hear, start running right away and just as fast as you possibly can. Do you promise me to do that?”

“Yes,” said Bambi softly. His mother spoke so seriously.

She went on speaking. “Out there if I should call you,” she said, “there must be no looking around and no questions, but you must get behind me instantly. Understand that. Run without pausing or stopping to think. If I begin to run, that means for you to run too, and no stopping until we are back here again. You won't forget, will you?”

“No,” said Bambi in a troubled voice.

“Now I'm going ahead,” said his mother, and seemed to become calmer.

She walked out. Bambi, who never took his eyes off her, saw how she moved forward with slow, cautious steps. He stood there full of expectancy, full of fear and curiosity. He saw how his mother listened in all directions, saw her shrink together, and shrank together himself, ready to leap back into the thickets. Then his mother grew calm again. She stretched herself. Then she looked around satisfied and called, “Come!”

Bambi bounded out. Joy seized him with such tremendous force that he forgot his worries in a flash. Through the thicket he could see only the green tree-tops overhead. Once in a while he caught a glimpse of the blue sky.

Now he saw the whole heaven stretching far and wide, and he rejoiced without knowing why. In the forest he had seen only a stray sunbeam now and then, or the tender, dappled light that played through the branches. Suddenly he was standing in the blinding hot sunlight whose boundless power was beaming upon

him. He stood in the splendid warmth that made him shut his eyes but which opened his heart.

Bambi was as though bewitched. He was completely beside himself with pleasure. He was simply wild. He leaped into the air three, four, five times. He had to do it. He felt a terrible desire to leap and jump. He stretched his young limbs joyfully. His breath came deeply and easily. He drank in the air. The sweet smell of the meadow made him so wildly happy that he had to leap into the air.

Bambi was a child. If he had been a human child he would have shouted. But he was a young deer, and deer cannot shout, at least not the way human children do. So he rejoiced with his legs and with his whole body as he flung himself into the air. His mother stood by and was glad. She saw that Bambi was wild. She watched how he bounded into the air and fell again awkwardly, in one spot. She saw how he stared around him, dazed and bewildered, only to leap up over and over again. She understood that Bambi knew only the narrow deer tracks in the forest and how his brief life was used to the limits of the thicket. He did not move from one place because he did not understand how to run freely around the open meadow.

So she stretched out her forefeet and bent laughingly towards Bambi for a moment. Then she was off with one bound, racing around in a circle so that the tall grass stems swished.

Bambi was frightened and stood motionless. Was that a sign for him to run back to the thicket? His mother had said to him, "Don't worry about me no matter what you see or hear. Just run as fast as you can." He was going to turn around and run as she had

commanded him to, but his mother came galloping up suddenly. She came up with a wonderful swishing sound and stopped two steps from him. She bent towards him, laughing as she had at first and cried, "Catch me." And in a flash she was gone.

Bambi was puzzled. What did she mean? Then she came back again running so fast that it made him giddy. She pushed his flank with her nose and said quickly, "Try to catch me," and fled away.

Bambi started after her. He took a few steps. Then his steps became short bounds. He felt as if he were flying without any effort on his part. There was a space under his hoofs, space under his bounding feet, space and still more space. Bambi was beside himself with joy.

The swishing grass sounded wonderful to his ears. It was marvelously soft and as fine as silk where it brushed against him. He ran around in a circle. He turned and flew off in a new circle, turned around again and kept running.

His mother was standing still, getting her breath again. She kept following Bambi with her eyes. He was wild.

Suddenly the race was over. He stopped and came up to his mother, lifting his hoofs elegantly. He looked joyfully at her. Then they strolled contentedly side by side.

Since he had been in the open, Bambi had felt the sky and the sun and the green meadow with his whole body. He took one blinding, giddy glance at the sun, and he felt its rays as they lay warmly on his back.

Presently he began to enjoy the meadow with his eyes also. Its wonders amazed him at every step he took. You could not see the tiniest speck of earth the way you could in the forest. Blade after blade of grass covered every inch of the ground. It tossed and waved luxuriantly. It bent softly aside under every footstep, only to rise up unharmed again. The broad green meadow was starred with white daisies, with the thick, round red and purple clover blossoms and bright, golden dandelion heads.

“Look, look, Mother!” Bambi exclaimed. “There’s a flower flying.”

“That’s not a flower,” said his mother, “that’s a butterfly.”

Bambi stared at the butterfly, entranced. It had darted lightly from a blade of grass and was fluttering about in its giddy way. Then Bambi saw that there were many butterflies flying in the air above the meadow. They seemed to be in a hurry and yet moved slowly, fluttering up and down in a sort of game that delighted him. They really did look like gay flying flowers that would not stay on their stems but had unfastened themselves in order to dance a little. They looked, too, like flowers that come to rest at sundown but have no fixed places and have to hunt for them, dropping down and vanishing as if they really had settled somewhere, yet always flying up again, a little way at first, then higher and higher, and always searching farther and farther because all the good places have already been taken.

Bambi gazed at them all. He would have loved to see one close by. He wanted to see one face to face but he was not able to. They sailed in and out continually. The air was aflutter with them.

When he looked down at the ground again he was delighted with the thousands of living things he saw stirring under his hoofs. They ran and jumped in all directions. He would see a wild swarm of them, and the next moment they had disappeared in the grass again.

“Who are they, Mother?” he asked.

“Those are ants,” his mother answered.

“Look,” cried Bambi, “see that piece of grass jumping. Look how high it can jump!”

“That's not grass,” his mother explained, “that's a nice grasshopper.”

“Why does he jump that way?” asked Bambi.

“Because we're walking here,” his mother answered, “he's afraid we'll step on him.”

“O,” said Bambi, turning to the grasshopper who was sitting on a daisy; “O,” he said again politely, “you don't have to be afraid; we won't hurt you.”

“I'm not afraid,” the grasshopper replied in a quavering voice; “I was only frightened for a moment when I was talking to my wife.”

“Excuse us for disturbing you,” said Bambi shyly.

“Not at all,” the grasshopper quavered. “Since it's you, it's perfectly all right. But you never know who's coming and you have

to be careful.”

“This is the first time in my life that I’ve ever been on the meadow,” Bambi explained; “my mother brought me....”

The grasshopper was sitting with his head lowered as though he were going to butt. He put on a serious face and murmured, “That doesn’t interest me at all. I haven’t time to stand here gossiping with you. I have to be looking for my wife. Hopp!” And he gave a jump.

“Hopp!” said Bambi in surprise at the high jump with which the grasshopper vanished.

Bambi ran to his mother. “Mother, I spoke to him,” he cried.

“To whom?” his mother asked.

“To the grasshopper,” Bambi said, “I spoke to him. He was very nice to me. And I like him so much. He’s so wonderful and green and you can see through his sides. They look like leaves, but you can’t see through a leaf.”

“Those are his wings,” said his mother.

“O,” Bambi went on, “and his face is so serious and wise. But he was very nice to me anyhow. And how he can jump! ‘Hopp!’ he said, and he jumped so high I couldn’t see him any more.”

They walked on. The conversation with the grasshopper had excited Bambi and tired him a little, for it was the first time he had ever spoken to a stranger. He felt hungry and pressed close to his mother to be nursed.

Then he stood quietly and gazed dreamily into space for a little while with a sort of joyous ecstasy that came over him every time he was nursed by his mother. He noticed a bright flower moving in the tangled grasses. Bambi looked more closely at it. No, it wasn't a flower, but a butterfly. Bambi crept closer.

The butterfly hung heavily to a grass stem and fanned its wings slowly.

"Please sit still," Bambi said.

"Why should I sit still? I'm a butterfly," the insect answered in astonishment.

"O, please sit still, just for a minute," Bambi pleaded, "I've wanted so much to see you close to. Please."

"Well," said the butterfly, "for your sake I will, but not for long."

Bambi stood in front of him. "How beautiful you are!" he cried, fascinated; "how wonderfully beautiful, like a flower!"

"What?" cried the butterfly, fanning his wings, "did you say like a flower? In my circle it's generally supposed that we're handsomer than flowers."

Bambi was embarrassed. "O, yes," he stammered, "much handsomer, excuse me, I only meant..."

"Whatever you meant is all one to me," the butterfly replied. He arched his thin body affectedly and played with his delicate feelers.

Bambi looked at him enchanted. "How elegant you are!" he said. "How elegant and fine! And how splendid and white your wings are!"

The butterfly spread his wings wide apart, then raised them till they folded together like an upright sail.

"O," cried Bambi, "I know that you are handsomer than the flowers. Besides, you can fly and the flowers can't because they grow on stems, that's why."

The butterfly spread his wings. "It's enough," he said, "that I can fly." He soared so lightly that Bambi could hardly see him or follow his flight. His wings moved gently and gracefully. Then he fluttered into the sunny air.

"I only sat still that long on your account," he said, balancing in the air in front of Bambi. "Now I'm going."

That was how Bambi found the meadow.

CHAPTER III

In the heart of the forest was a little glade that belonged to Bambi's mother. It lay only a few steps from the narrow trail where the deer went bounding through the woods. But no one could ever have found it who did not know the little passage leading to it through the thick bushes.

The glade was very narrow, so narrow that there was only room for Bambi and his mother, and so low that when Bambi's mother stood up her head was hidden among the branches. Sprays of hazel, furze, and dogwood, woven about each other, intercepted the little bit of sunlight that came through the tree-tops, so that it never reached the ground. Bambi had come into the world in this glade. It was his mother's and his.

His mother was lying asleep on the ground. Bambi had dozed a little, too. But suddenly he had become wide awake. He got up and looked around.

The shadows were so deep where he was that it was almost dark. From the woods came soft rustlings. Now and again the titmice chirped. Now and again came the clear hammering of the woodpecker or the joyless call of a crow. Everything else was still, far and wide. But the air was sizzling in the midday heat so that you could hear it if you listened closely. And it was stiflingly sweet.

Bambi looked down at his mother and said "Are you asleep?"

No, his mother was not asleep. She had awakened the moment

Bambi got up.

“What are we going to do now?” Bambi asked.

“Nothing,” his mother answered. “We’re going to stay right where we are. Lie down, like a good boy, and go to sleep.”

But Bambi had no desire to go to sleep. “Come on,” he begged, “let’s go to the meadow.”

His mother lifted her head. “Go to the meadow,” she said, “go to the meadow now?” Her voice was so full of astonishment and terror that Bambi became quite frightened.

“Can’t we go to the meadow?” he asked timidly.

“No,” his mother answered, and it sounded very final. “No, you can’t go now.”

“Why?” Bambi perceived that something mysterious was involved. He grew still more frightened, but at the same time he was terribly anxious to know everything. “Why can’t we go to the meadow?” he asked.

“You’ll find out all about it later when you’re bigger,” his mother replied.

“But,” Bambi insisted, “I’d rather know now.”

“Later,” his mother repeated, “you’re nothing but a baby yet,” she went on tenderly, “and we don’t talk about such things to children.” She had grown quite serious. “Fancy going to the meadow at this time of day. I don’t even like to think of it. Why, it’s

broad daylight.”

“But it was broad daylight when we went to the meadow before,” Bambi objected.

“That's different,” his mother explained, “it was early in the morning.”

“Can we only go there early in the morning?” Bambi was very curious.

His mother was patient. “Only in the early morning or late evening,” she said, “or at night.”

“And never in the daytime, never?”

His mother hesitated. “Well,” she said at last, “sometimes a few of us do go there in the daytime.... But those are special occasions.... I can't just explain it to you, you are too young yet.... Some of us do go there.... But we are exposed to the greatest danger.”

“What kind of danger?” asked Bambi all attention.

But his mother did not want to go on with the conversation. “We're in danger, and that's enough for you, my son. You can't understand such things yet.”

Bambi thought that he could understand everything except why his mother did not want to tell him the truth. But he kept silent.

“That's what life means for us,” his mother went on, “though we all love the daylight, especially when we're young, we have to

lie quiet all day long. We can only roam around from evening till morning. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Bambi.

"So, my son, we'll have to stay where we are. We're safe here. Now lie down again and go to sleep."

But Bambi didn't want to lie down. "Why are we safe here?" he asked.

"Because all the bushes shield us," his mother answered, "and the twigs snap on the shrubs and the dry twigs crackle and give us warning. And last year's dead leaves lie on the ground and rustle to warn us, and the jays and magpies keep watch so we can tell from a distance if anybody is coming."

"What are last year's leaves?" Bambi asked.

"Come and sit beside me," said his mother, "and I will tell you." Bambi sat down contentedly, nestling close to his mother. And she told him how the trees are not always green, how the sunshine and the pleasant warmth disappear. Then it grows cold, the frost turns the leaves yellow, brown and red, and they fall slowly so that the trees and bushes stretch their bare branches to the sky and look perfectly naked. But the dry leaves lie on the ground, and when a foot stirs them they rustle. Then someone is coming. O, how kind last year's dead leaves are! They do their duty so well and are so alert and watchful. Even in mid-summer there are a lot of them hidden beneath the undergrowth. And they give warning in advance of every danger.

Bambi pressed close against his mother. It was so cozy to sit there and listen while his mother talked.

When she grew silent he began to think. He thought it was very kind of the good old leaves to keep watch, though they were all dead and frozen and had suffered so much. He wondered just what that danger could be that his mother was always talking about. But too much thought tired him. Round about him it was still. Only the air sizzling in the heat was audible. Then he fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

One evening Bambi was roaming about the meadow again with his mother. He thought that he knew everything there was to see or hear there. But in reality it appeared that he did not know as much as he thought.

This time was just like the first. Bambi played tag with his mother. He ran around in circles, and the open space, the deep sky, the fresh air intoxicated him so that he grew perfectly wild. After a while he noticed that his mother was standing still. He stopped short in the middle of a lean so suddenly that his four legs spread far apart. To get his balance he bounded high into the air and then stood erect. His mother seemed to be talking to someone he couldn't make out through the tall grasses. Bambi toddled up inquisitively.

Two long ears were moving in the tangled grass stems close to his mother. They were grayish-brown and prettily marked with black stripes. Bambi stopped, but his mother said, "Come here. This is our friend, the Hare. Come here like a nice boy and let him see you."

Bambi went over. There sat the Hare looking like a very honest creature. At times his long spoon-like ears stood bolt upright. At others they fell back limply as though they had suddenly grown weak. Bambi became somewhat critical as he looked at the whiskers that stood out so stiff and straight on both sides of the Hare's mouth. But he noticed that the Hare had a very mild face and extremely good-natured features, and that he cast timid glances at

the world from out of his big round eyes. The Hare really did look friendly. Bambi's passing doubts vanished immediately. But oddly enough, he had lost all the respect he originally felt for the Hare.

“Good evening, young man,” the Hare greeted him, with studied politeness.

Bambi merely nodded good evening. He didn't understand why, but he simply nodded. He was very friendly and civil, but a little condescending. He could not help it himself. Perhaps he was born that way.

“What a charming young prince,” said the Hare to Bambi's mother. He looked at Bambi attentively, raising first one spoon-like ear, then the other, and then both of them, and letting them fall again, suddenly and limply, which didn't please Bambi. The motion of the Hare's ears seemed to say, “He isn't worth bothering with.”

Meanwhile the Hare continued to study Bambi with his big round eyes. His nose and his mouth with the handsome whiskers moved incessantly in the same way a man who is trying not to sneeze twitches his nose and lips. Bambi had to laugh.

The Hare laughed quickly, too, but his eyes grew more thoughtful. “I congratulate you,” he said to Bambi's mother. “I sincerely congratulate you on your son. Yes, indeed, he'll make a splendid prince in time. Anyone can see that.”

To Bambi's boundless surprise he suddenly sat straight on his hind legs. After he had spied all around with his ears stiffened and his nose constantly twitching, he sat down decently on all fours again. “Now if you good people will excuse me,” he said at last, “I

have all kinds of things to do to-night. If you'll be so good as to excuse me....” He turned away and hopped off with his ears back so that they touched his shoulders.

“Good evening,” Bambi called after him.

His mother smiled. “The good Hare,” she said; “he is so suave and prudent. He doesn't have an easy time of it in this world. There was sympathy in her voice.

Bambi strolled about a little and left his mother to her meal. He wanted to meet his friend again and he wanted to make new acquaintances, besides. For without being very clear himself what it was he wanted, he felt a certain expectancy. Suddenly, at a distance, he heard a soft rustling on the meadow, and felt a quick, gentle step tapping the ground. He peered ahead of him. Over on the edge of the woods something was gliding through the grasses. Was it alive? No, there were two things. Bambi cast a quick glance at his mother but she wasn't paying attention to anything and had her head deep in the grass. But the game was going on on the other side of the meadow in a shifting circle exactly as Bambi himself had raced around before. Bambi was so excited that he sprang back as if he wanted to run away. Then his mother noticed him and raised her head.

“What's the matter?” she called.

But Bambi was speechless. He could not find his tongue and only stammered, “Look over there.”

His mother looked over. “I see,” she said, “that's my cousin, and sure enough she has a baby too, now. No, she has two of them.”

His mother spoke at first out of pure happiness, but she had grown serious. "To think that Ena has two babies," she said, "two of them."

Bambi stood gazing across the meadow. He saw a creature that looked just like his mother. He hadn't even noticed her before. He saw that the grasses were being shaken in a double circle, but only a pair of reddish backs were visible like thin red streaks.

"Come," his mother said, "we'll go over. They'll be company for you."

Bambi would have run, but as his mother walked slowly, peering to right and to left at every step, he held himself back. Still, he was bursting with excitement and very impatient.

"I thought we would meet Ena sometime," his mother went on to say. "Where can she have been keeping herself? I thought I knew she had one child, that wasn't hard to guess. But two of them!..."

At last the others saw them and came to meet them. Bambi had to greet his aunt, but his mind was entirely on the children.

His aunt was very friendly. "Well," she said to him, "this is Gobo and that is Faline. Now you run along and play together."

The children stood stock-still and stared at each other, Gobo close beside Faline and Bambi in front of him. None of them stirred. They stood and gaped.

"Run along," said Bambi's mother, "you'll soon be friends."

"What a lovely child," Aunt Ena replied. "He is really lovely. So

strong, and he stands so well.”

“O well,” said his mother modestly, “we have to be content. But to have two of them, Ena!...”

“O yes, that's all very well,” Ena declared; “you know, dear, I've had children before.”

“Bambi is my first,” his mother said.

“We'll see,” Ena comforted her, “perhaps it will be different with you next time, too.”

The children were still standing and staring at each other. No one said a word. Suddenly Faline gave a leap and rushed away. It had become too much for her.

In a moment Bambi darted after her. Gobo followed him. They flew around in a semicircle, they turned tail and fell over each other. Then they chased each other up and down. It was glorious. When they stopped, all topsy-turvy and somewhat breathless, they were already good friends. They began to chatter.

Bambi told them how he talked to the nice grasshopper and the butterfly.

“Did you ever talk to the goldbug?” asked Faline.

No, Bambi had never talked to the goldbug. He did not even know who he was.

“I've talked to him often,” Faline declared, a little pertly.

“The jay insulted me,” said Bambi.

“Really,” said Gobo astonished, “did the jay treat you like that?” Gobo was very easily astonished and was extremely timid.

“Well,” he observed, “the hedgehog stuck me in the nose.” But he only mentioned it in passing.

“Who is the hedgehog?” Bambi asked eagerly. It seemed wonderful to him to be there with friends, listening to so many exciting things.

“The hedgehog is a terrible creature,” cried Faline, “full of long spines all over his body and very wicked!”

“Do you really think he's wicked?” asked Gobo. “He never hurts anybody.”

“Is that so?” answered Faline quickly. “Didn't he stick you?”

“O, that was only because I wanted to speak to him,” Gobo replied, “and only a little anyhow. It didn't hurt me much.”

Bambi turned to Gobo. “Why didn't he want you to talk to him?” he asked.

“He doesn't talk to anybody,” Faline interrupted, “even if you just come where he is he rolls himself up so he's nothing but prickles all over. Our mother says he's one of those people who don't want to have anything to do with the world.”

“Maybe he's only afraid,” Gobo said.

But Faline knew better. “Mother says you shouldn't meddle with such people,” she said.

Presently Bambi began to ask Gobo softly. "Do you know what 'danger' means?"

Then they both grew serious and all three heads drew together. Gobo thought a while. He made a special effort to remember for he saw how curious Bambi was for the answer. "Danger," he whispered, "is something very bad."

"Yes," Bambi declared excitedly, "I know it's something very bad, but what?" All three trembled with fear.

Suddenly Faline cried out loudly and joyfully, "I know what danger is—it's what you run away from." She sprang away. She couldn't bear to stay there any longer and be frightened. In an instant, Bambi and Gobo had bounded after her. They began to play again. They tumbled in the rustling, silky green meadow grass, and in a twinkling had forgotten all about the absorbing question. After a while they stopped and stood chattering together as before. They looked towards their mothers. They were standing close together, eating a little and carrying on a quiet conversation.

Aunt Ena raised her head and called the children. "Come, Gobo. Come, Faline. We have to go now."

And Bambi's mother said to him, "Come, it's time to go."

"Wait just a little longer," Faline pleaded eagerly, "just a little while."

"Let's stay a little longer, please," Bambi pleaded, "it's so nice." And Gobo repeated timidly, "It's so nice, just a little longer." All three spoke at once.

Ena looked at Bambi's mother. "What did I tell you," she said, "they won't want to separate now."

Then something happened that was much more exciting than everything else that happened to Bambi that day. Out of the woods came the sound of hoofs beating the earth. Branches snapped, the boughs rustled, and before Bambi had time to listen, something burst out of the thicket. Someone came crashing and rustling with someone else rushing after him. They tore by like the wind, described a wide circle on the meadow and vanished into the woods again, where they could be heard galloping. Then they came bursting out of the thicket again and suddenly stood still, about twenty paces apart.

Bambi looked at them and did not stir. They looked like his mother and Aunt Ena. But their heads were crowned with gleaming antlers covered with brown beads and bright white prongs. Bambi was completely overcome. He looked from one to the other. One was smaller and his antlers narrower. But the other one was stately and beautiful. He carried his head up and his antlers rose high above it.

They flashed from dark to light, adorned with the splendor of many black and brown prongs.

"O," cried Faline in admiration. "O," Gobo repeated softly. But Bambi said nothing. He was entranced and silent. Then they both moved and, turning away from each other, walked slowly back into the woods in opposite directions. The stately stag passed close to the children and Bambi's mother and Aunt Ena. He passed by in silent splendor; holding his noble head royally high and honoring

no one with so much as a glance.

The children did not dare to breathe till he had disappeared into the thicket. They turned to look after the other one, but at that very moment the green door of the forest closed on him.

Faline was the first to break silence. "Who were they?" she cried. But her pert little voice trembled.

"Who were they?" Gobo repeated in a hardly audible voice. Bambi kept silent.

Aunt Ena said solemnly, "Those were your fathers."

Nothing more was said, and they parted. Aunt Ena led her children into the nearest thicket. It was her trail. Bambi and his mother had to cross the whole meadow to the oak in order to reach their own path. He was silent for a long time before he finally asked, "Didn't they see us?"

His mother understood what he meant and replied, "Of course, they saw all of us."

Bambi was troubled. He felt shy about asking questions, but it was too much for him. "Then why..." he began, and stopped.

His mother helped him along. "What is it you want to know, son?" she asked.

"Why didn't they stay with us?"

"They don't ever stay with us," his mother answered, "only at times."

Bambi continued, "But why didn't they speak to us?"

His mother said, "They don't speak to us now; only at times. We have to wait till they come to us. And we have to wait for them to speak to us. They do it whenever they like."

With a troubled heart, Bambi asked, "Will my father speak to me?"

"Of course he will," his mother promised. "When you are grown up he'll speak to you, and you'll have to stay with him sometimes."

Bambi walked silently beside his mother, his whole mind filled with his father's appearance. "How handsome he is!" he thought over and over again. "How handsome he is!"

As though his mother could read his thoughts, she said, "If you live, my son, if you are cunning and don't run into danger, you'll be as strong and handsome as your father is sometime, and you'll have antlers like his, too."

Bambi breathed deeply. His heart swelled with joy and expectancy.

CHAPTER V

Time passed, and Bambi had many adventures and went through many experiences. Every day brought something new. Sometimes he felt quite giddy. He had so incredibly much to learn.

He could listen now, not merely hear, when things happened so close that they struck the ear of their own accord. No, there was really no art in that. He could really listen intelligently now to everything that stirred, no matter how softly. He heard even the tiniest whisper that the wind brought by. For instance, he knew that a pheasant was running through the next bushes. He recognized clearly the soft quick tread that was always stopping. He knew by ear the sound the field mice make when they run to and fro on their little paths. And the patter of the moles when they are in a good humor and chase one another around the elder bushes so that there is just the slightest rustling. He heard the shrill clear call of the falcon, and he knew from its altered, angry tones when a hawk or an eagle approached. The falcon was angry because she was afraid her field would be taken from her. He knew the beat of the wood-doves' wings, the beautiful, distant, soaring cries of ducks, and many other things besides.

He knew how to snuff the air now, too. Soon he would do it as well as his mother. He could breathe in the air and at the same time analyze it with his senses. "That's clover and meadow grass," he would think when the wind blew off the fields. "And Friend Hare is out there, too. I can smell him plainly."

Again he would notice through the smell of leaves and earth, wild leek and wood mustard, that the ferret was passing by. He could tell by putting his nose to the ground and snuffing deeply that the fox was afoot. Or he would know that one of his family was somewhere nearby. It might be Aunt Ena and the children.

By now he was good friends with the night and no longer wanted to run about so much in broad daylight. He was quite willing to lie all day long in the shade of the leafy glade with his mother. He would listen to the air sizzling in the heat and then fall asleep.

From time to time, he would wake up, listen and snuff the air to find out how things stood. Everything was as it should be. Only the titmice were chattering a little to each other, the midges who were hardly ever still, hummed, while the wood-doves never ceased declaiming their ecstatic tenderness. What concern was it of his? He would drop off to sleep again.

He liked the night very much now. Everything was alive, everything was in motion. Of course, he had to be cautious at night too, but still he could be less careful. And he could go wherever he wanted to. And everywhere he went he met acquaintances. They too were always less nervous than in the daytime.

At night the woods were solemn and still. There were only a few voices. They sounded loud in the stillness, and they had a different ring from daytime voices, and left a deeper impression.

Bambi liked to see the owl. She had such a wonderful flight, perfectly light and perfectly noiseless. She made as little sound as a

butterfly, and yet she was so dreadfully big. She had such striking features, too, so pronounced and so deeply thoughtful. And such wonderful eyes! Bambi admired her firm, quietly courageous glance. He liked to listen when she talked to his mother or to anybody else. He would stand a little to one side, for he was somewhat afraid of the masterful glance that he admired so much. He did not understand most of the clever things she said, but he knew they were clever, and they pleased him and filled him with respect for the owl.

Then the owl would begin to hoot. “Hooah! — Ha! — Ha! — Haa! —ah!” she would cry. It sounded different from the thrushes' song, or the yellow-birds', different from the friendly notes of the cuckoo, but Bambi loved the owl's cry, for he felt its mysterious earnestness, its unutterable wisdom and strange melancholy.

Then there was the screech-owl, a charming little fellow, lively and gay with no end to his inquisitiveness. He was bent on attracting attention. “Oi, yeek! Oi, yeek!” he would call in a terrible, high-pitched, piercing voice. It sounded as if he were on the point of death. But he was really in a beaming good humor and was hilariously happy whenever he frightened anybody. “Oi, yeek!” he would cry so dreadfully loud that the forests heard it for a mile around. But afterwards he would laugh with a soft chuckle, though you could only hear it if you stood close by.

Bambi discovered that the screech-owl was delighted whenever he frightened anyone, or when anybody thought that something dreadful had happened to him. After that, whenever Bambi met him, he never failed to rush up and ask, “What has happened to you?” or to say with a sigh, “O, how you frightened me just now!”

Then the owl would be delighted.

“O, yes,” he would say, laughing, “it sounds pretty gruesome.” He would puff up his feathers into a grayish-white ball and look extremely handsome.

There were storms, too, once or twice, both in the daytime and at night. The first was in the daytime and Bambi felt himself grow terrified as it became darker and darker in his glade. It seemed to him as if night had covered the sky at mid-day. When the raging storm broke through the woods so that the trees began to groan aloud, Bambi trembled with terror. And when the lightning flashed and the thunder growled, Bambi was numb with fear and thought the end of the world had come. He ran behind his mother, who had sprung up somewhat disturbed and was walking back and forth in the thicket. He could not think about nor understand anything. The rain fell in raging torrents. Everyone had run to shelter. The woods were empty. But there was no escaping the rain. The pouring water penetrated even the thickest parts of the bushes. Presently the lightning stopped, and the fiery rays ceased to flicker through the tree-tops. The thunder rolled away. Bambi could hear it in the distance, and soon it stopped altogether. The rain beat more gently. It pattered evenly and steadily around him for another hour. The forest stood breathing deeply in the calm and let the water drain off. No one was afraid to come out any more. That feeling had passed. The rain had washed it away.

Never before had Bambi and his mother gone to the meadow as early as on that evening. It was not even dusk yet. The sun was still high in the sky, the air was extremely fresh, and smelt sweeter than usual, and the woods rang with a thousand voices, for everyone had

crept out of his shelter and was running excitedly, telling what had just happened.

Before they went on to the meadow, they passed the great oak that stood near the forest's edge, close to their trail. They always had to pass that beautiful big tree when they went to the meadow.

This time the squirrel was sitting on a branch and greeted them. Bambi was good friends with the squirrel. The first time he met him he took him for a very small deer because of the squirrel's red coat and stared at him in surprise. But Bambi had been very childish at that time and had known nothing at all.

The squirrel pleased him greatly from the first. He was so thoroughly civil, and talkative. And Bambi loved to see how wonderfully he could turn, and climb, and leap, and balance himself. In the middle of a conversation the squirrel would run up and down the smooth tree trunk as though there were nothing to it. Or he would sit upright on a swaying branch, balance himself comfortably with his bushy tail that stuck up so gracefully behind him, display his white chest, hold his little forepaws elegantly in front of him, nod his head this way and that, laugh with his jolly eyes, and, in a twinkling, say a lot of comical and interesting things. Then he would come down again, so swiftly and with such leaps, that you expected him to tumble on his head.

He twitched his long tail violently and called to them from overhead, "Good day! Good day! It's so nice of you to come over." Bambi and his mother stopped.

The squirrel ran down the smooth trunk. "Well," he chattered,

“did you get through it all right? Of course, I see that everything is first rate. That's the main thing.”

He ran up the trunk again like lightning and said, “It's too wet for me down there. Wait, I'm going to look for a better place. I hope you don't mind. Thanks, I knew you wouldn't. And we can talk just as well from here.”

He ran back and forth along a straight limb. “It was a bad business,” he said, “a monstrous uproar! You wouldn't believe how scared I was. I hunched myself up as still as a mouse in the corner and hardly dared move. That's the worst of it, having to sit there and not move. And all the time you're hoping nothing will happen. But my tree is wonderful in such cases. There's no denying it, my tree is wonderful! I'll say that for it. I'm satisfied with it. As long as I've had it, I've never wanted any other. But when it cuts loose the way it did to-day you're sure to get frightened no matter where you are.”

The squirrel sat up, balancing himself with his handsome upright tail. He displayed his white chest and pressed both forepaws protestingly against his heart. You believed without his adding anything that he had been excited.

“We're going to the meadow now to dry ourselves off in the sun,” Bambi's mother said.

“That's a good idea,” cried the squirrel, “you're really so clever. I'm always saying how clever you are.” With a bound he sprang onto a higher branch. “You couldn't do anything better than go to the meadow now,” he called down. Then he swung with light

bounds back and forth through the tree-top. "I'm going up where I can get the sunlight," he chattered merrily, "I'm all soaked through. I'm going all the way up." He didn't care whether they were still listening to him or not.

The meadow was full of life. Friend Hare was there and had brought along his family. Aunt Ena was there with her children and a few acquaintances. That day Bambi saw the fathers again. They came slowly out of the forest from opposite directions. There was a third stag too. Each walked slowly in his track, back and forth, along the meadow. They paid no attention to anyone and did not even talk to one another. Bambi looked at them frequently. He was respectful, but full of curiosity.

Then he talked to Faline and Gobo and a few other children. He wanted to play a while. All agreed and they began running around in a circle. Faline was the gayest of all. She was so fresh and nimble and brimming over with bright ideas. But Gobo was soon tired. He had been terribly frightened by the storm. His heart had hammered loudly and was still pounding. There was something very weak about Gobo, but Bambi liked him because he was so good and willing and always a little sad without letting you know it.

Time passed and Bambi was learning how good the meadow grass tasted, how tender and sweet the leaf buds and the clover were. When he nestled against his mother for comfort it often happened that she pushed him away.

"You aren't a little baby any more," she would say. Sometimes she even said abruptly, "Go away and let me be." It even happened

sometimes that his mother got up in the little forest glade, got up in the middle of the day, and went off without noticing whether Bambi was following her or not. At times it seemed, when they were wandering down the familiar paths, as if his mother did not want to notice whether Bambi was behind her or was trailing after.

One day his mother was gone. Bambi did not know how such a thing could be possible, he could not figure it out. But his mother was gone and for the first time Bambi was left alone.

He wandered about, he was troubled, he grew worried and anxious and began to want her terribly. He stood quite sadly, calling her. Nobody answered and nobody came.

He listened and snuffed the air. He could not smell anything. He called again. Softly, pathetically, tearfully, he called "Mother, Mother!" in vain.

Then despair seized him, he could not stand it and started to walk.

He wandered down the trails he knew, stopping and calling. He wandered farther and farther with hesitating steps, frightened and helpless. He was very downcast.

He went on and on and came to trails where he had never been before. He came to places that were strange to him. He no longer knew where he was going.

Then he heard two childish voices like his own calling, "Mother! Mother!" He stood still and listened. Surely that was Gobo and Faline. It must be they.

He ran quickly towards the voices and soon he saw their little red jackets showing through the leaves. Gobo and Faline were standing side by side under a dog-wood tree and calling mournfully, "Mother, Mother!"

They were overjoyed when they heard the rustling in the bushes. But they were disappointed when they saw Bambi. They were a little consoled that he was there, however. And Bambi was glad not to be all alone any more.

"My mother is gone," Bambi said.

"Ours is gone too," Gobo answered plaintively.

They looked at one another and were quite despondent.

"Where can they be?" asked Bambi. He was almost sobbing.

"I don't know," sighed Gobo. His heart was pounding and he felt miserable.

Suddenly Faline said, "I think they may be with our fathers."

Gobo and Bambi looked at her surprised. They were filled with awe. "You mean that they're visiting our fathers?" asked Bambi and trembled. Faline trembled too, but she made a wise face. She acted like a person who knows more than she will let on. Of course she knew nothing, she could not even guess where her idea came from. But when Gobo repeated, "Do you really think so?" she put on a meaningful air and answered mysteriously, "Yes, I think so."

Anyway it was a suggestion that needed to be thought about. But in spite of that Bambi felt no easier. He couldn't even think

about it, he was too troubled and too sad.

He went off. He wouldn't stay in one place. Faline and Gobo went along with him for a little way. All three were calling, "Mother, Mother!" Then Gobo and Faline stopped, they did not dare go any farther. Faline said, "Why should we? Mother knows where we are. Let's stay here so she can find us when she comes back."

Bambi went on alone. He wandered through a thicket to a little clearing. In the middle of the clearing Bambi stopped short. He suddenly felt as if he were rooted to the ground and could not move.

On the edge of the clearing, by a tall hazel bush, a creature was standing. Bambi had never seen such a creature before. At the same time the air brought him a scent such as he had never smelled in his life. It was a strange smell, heavy and acrid. It excited him to the point of madness.

Bambi stared at the creature. It stood remarkably erect. It was extremely thin and had a pale face, entirely bare around the nose and the eyes. A kind of dread emanated from that face, a cold terror. That face had a tremendous power over him. It was unbearably painful to look at that face and yet Bambi stood staring fixedly at it.

For a long time the creature stood without moving. Then it stretched out a leg from high up near its face. Bambi had not even noticed that there was one there. But as that terrible leg was reaching out into the air Bambi was swept away by the mere gesture. In a flash he was back into the thicket he came from, and

was running away.

In a twinkling his mother was with him again, too. She bounded beside him over shrubs and bushes. They ran side by side as fast as they could. His mother was in the lead. She knew the way and Bambi followed. They ran till they came to their glade.

“Did you see Him?” asked the mother softly.

Bambi could not answer, he had no breath left. He only nodded.

“That was He,” said the mother.

And they both shuddered.

CHAPTER VI

Bambi was often alone now. But he was not so troubled about it as he had been the first time. His mother would disappear, and no matter how much he called her she wouldn't come back. Later she would appear unexpectedly and stay with him as before.

One night he was roaming around quite forlorn again. He could not even find Gobo and Faline. The sky had become pale gray and it began to darken so that the tree-tops seemed like a vault over the bushy undergrowth. There was a swishing in the bushes, a loud rustling came through the leaves and Bambi's mother dashed out. Someone else raced close behind her. Bambi did not know whether it was Aunt Ena or his father or someone else. But he recognized his mother at once. Though she rushed past him so quickly, he had recognized her voice. She screamed, and it seemed to Bambi as if it were in play, though he thought it sounded a little frightened too.

One day Bambi wandered for hours through the thicket. At last he began to call. He simply couldn't bear to be so utterly lonely any more. He felt that pretty soon he'd be perfectly miserable. So he began to call for his mother.

Suddenly one of the fathers was standing in front of him looking sternly down at him. Bambi hadn't heard him coming and was terrified. This stag looked more powerful than the others, taller and prouder. His coat shone with a deeper richer red, but his face shimmered, silvery gray. And tall, black, beaded antlers rose high above his nervous ears.

“What are you crying about?” the old stag asked severely. Bambi trembled in awe and did not dare answer. “Your mother has no time for you now,” the old stag went on. Bambi was completely dominated by his masterful voice and at the same time, he admired it. “Can't you stay by yourself? Shame on you!”

Bambi wanted to say that he was perfectly able to stay by himself, that he had often been left alone already, but he could not get it out. He was obedient and he felt terribly ashamed. The stag turned around and was gone. Bambi didn't know where or how, or whether the stag had gone slow or fast. He had simply gone as suddenly as he had come. Bambi strained his ears to listen but he could not catch the sound of a departing footstep or a leaf stirring. So he thought the old stag must be somewhere close by and snuffed the air in all directions. It brought him no scent. Bambi sighed with relief to think he was alone. But he felt a lively desire to see the old stag again and win his approval.

When his mother came back he did not tell her anything of his encounter. He did not call her any more either the next time she disappeared. He thought of the old stag while he wandered around. He wanted very much to meet him. He wanted to say to him, “See, I don't call my mother any more,” so the old stag would praise him.

But he told Gobo and Faline the next time they were together on the meadow. They listened attentively and had nothing to relate that could compare with this.

“Weren't you frightened?” asked Gobo excitedly.

O, well—Bambi confessed he had been frightened. But only a

little.

“I should have been terribly frightened,” Gobo declared.

Bambi replied, no, he hadn't been very much afraid, because the stag was so handsome.

“That wouldn't have helped me much,” Gobo added, “I'd have been too afraid to look at him. When I'm frightened I have streaks before my eyes so that I can't see at all, and my heart beats so fast that I can't breathe.”

Faline became very thoughtful after Bambi's story and did not say anything.

But the next time they met, Gobo and Faline bounded up in great haste. They were alone again and so was Bambi. “We have been hunting for you all this time,” cried Gobo. “Yes,” Faline said importantly, “because now we know who it was you saw.” Bambi bounded into the air for curiosity and asked, “Who?”

Faline said solemnly, “It was the old Prince.”

“Who told you that?” Bambi demanded.

“Mother,” Faline replied.

Bambi was amazed. “Did you tell her the whole story?” They both nodded. “But it was a secret,” Bambi cried angrily.

Gobo tried to shield himself at once. “I didn't do it, it was Faline,” he said. But Faline cried excitedly, “What do you mean, a secret? I wanted to know who it was. Now we all know and it's

much more exciting.”

Bambi was burning up with desire to hear all about it and let himself be mollified. Faline told him everything. “The old Prince is the biggest stag in the whole forest. There isn't anybody else that compares with him. Nobody knows how old he is. Nobody can find out where he lives. No one knows his family. Very few have seen him even once. At times he was thought to be dead because he hadn't been seen for so long. Then someone would see him again for a second and so they knew he was still alive. Nobody had ever dared ask him where he had been. He speaks to nobody and no one dares speak to him. He uses trails none of the others ever use. He knows the very depths of the forest. And he does not know such a thing as danger. Other Princes fight one another at times, sometimes in fun or to try each other out, sometimes in earnest. For many years no one has fought with the old stag. And of those who fought with him long ago not one is living. He is the great Prince.”

Bambi forgave Gobo and Faline for babbling his secret to their mother. He was even glad to have found out all these important things, but he was glad that Gobo and Faline did not know all about it. They did not know that the great Prince had said, “Can't you stay by yourself? Shame on you!” Now Bambi was very glad that he had not told them about these things. For then Gobo and Faline would have told that along with the rest, and the whole forest would have gossiped about it.

That night when the moon rose Bambi's mother came back again. He suddenly saw her standing under the great oak at the edge of the meadow looking around for him. He saw her right away and ran to her.

That night Bambi learned something new. His mother was tired and hungry. They did not walk as far as usual. The mother quieted her hunger on the meadow where Bambi too was used to eating most of his meals. Side by side they nibbled at the bushes and pleasantly ruminating, went farther and farther into the woods.

Presently there was a loud rustling in the bushes. Before Bambi could guess what it was his mother began to cry aloud as she did when she was very terrified or when she was beside herself. "Aoh!" she cried and, giving a bound, stopped and cried, "Aoh, baoh!" Bambi tried to make out the mighty forms which were drawing near as the rustling grew louder. They were right near now. They resembled Bambi and Bambi's mother, Aunt Ena and all the rest of his family, but they were gigantic and so powerfully built that he stared up at them overcome.

Suddenly Bambi began to bleat, "Aoh baoh-baoh!" He hardly knew he was bleating. He couldn't help himself. The procession tramped slowly by. Three, four giant apparitions, one after the other. The last of them was bigger than any of the others. He had a wild mane on his neck and his antlers were tree-like. It took Bambi's breath away to see them. He stood and bleated from a heart full of wonder, for he was more weirdly affected than ever before in his life. He was afraid, but in a peculiar way. He felt how pitifully small he was, and even his mother seemed to him to have shrunk. He felt ashamed without understanding why, and at the same time terror shook him. He bleated, "Baoh! b-a-o-h!" He felt better when he bleated that way.

The procession had gone by. There was nothing more to be seen or heard. Even his mother was silent. Only Bambi kept giving

short bleats now and then. He still felt the shock.

“Be still,” his mother said, “they have gone now.”

“O, Mother,” Bambi whispered, “who was it?”

“Well,” said his mother, “they are not so dangerous when all is said and done. Those are your big cousins, the elk—they are strong and they are important, far stronger than we are.”

“And aren't they dangerous?” Bambi asked.

“Not as a rule,” his mother explained, “Of course, a good many things are said to have happened.” This and that is told about them, but I don't know if there is any truth in such gossip or not. They've never done any harm to me or to any one of my acquaintances.”

“Why should they do anything to us?” asked Bambi, “if they are cousins of ours?” He wanted to feel calm but he kept trembling.

“O, they never do anything to us,” his mother answered, “but I don't know why, I'm frightened whenever I see them. I don't understand it myself. But it happens that way every time.”

Bambi was gradually reassured by her words but he remained thoughtful. Right above him in the branches of an alder, the screech-owl was hooting in his blood-curdling way. Bambi was distracted and forgot to act as if he had been frightened. But the screech-owl flew by anyhow and asked, “Didn't I frighten you?”

“Of course,” Bambi replied, “you always frighten me.”

The screech-owl chuckled softly. He was pleased. “I hope you

don't hold it against me," he said, it's just my way. He fluffed himself up so that he resembled a ball, sank his bill in his foamy white feathers and put on a terribly wise and serious face. He was satisfied with himself.

Bambi poured out his heart to him. "Do you know?" he began shyly, "I've just had a much worse fright."

"Indeed!" said the owl, displeased.

Bambi told him about his encounter with his giant relations.

"Don't talk to me about relations," the owl exclaimed, "I've got relations too. But I only fly around in the daytime so they are all down on me now. No, there isn't much use in relations. If they're bigger than you are, they're no good to you, and if they're smaller they're worth still less." If they're bigger than you, you can't bear them because they're proud, and if they're smaller they can't bear you because you're proud. No, I prefer to have nothing to do with the whole crowd."

"But, I don't even know my relations," Bambi said, laughing shyly, "I never heard of them, I never saw them before to-day."

"Don't bother about such people," the screech-owl advised. "Believe me," and he rolled his eyes significantly, "believe me, it's the best way. Relatives are never as good as friends. Look at us, we're not related in any way but we're good friends and that's much better."

Bambi wanted to say something else but the screech-owl went on, "I've had experience with such things. You are still too young

but, believe me, I know better. Besides, I don't like to get mixed up in family affairs.” He rolled his eyes thoughtfully and looked so impressive with his serious face that Bambi kept a discreet silence.

CHAPTER VII

Another night passed and morning brought an event.

It was a cloudless morning, dewy and fresh. All the leaves on the trees and the bushes seemed suddenly to smell sweeter. The meadows sent up great clouds of perfume to the tree-tops.

“Peep!” said the titmice when they awoke. They said it very softly. But since it was still gray dawn they said nothing else for a while. For a time it was perfectly still. Then a crow's hoarse, rasping caw sounded far above in the sky. The crows had awakened and were visiting one another in the tree-tops. The magpie answered at once, “Shackarakshak! Did you think I was still asleep?” Then a hundred small voices started in very softly here and there. “Peep! peep! tiu!” Sleep and the dark were still in these sounds. And they came from far apart.

Suddenly a blackbird flew to the top of a beech. She perched way up on the topmost twig that stuck up thin against the sky and sat there watching how, far away over the trees, the night-weary, pale-gray heavens were glowing in the distant east and coming to life. Then she commenced to sing.

Her little black body seemed only a tiny dark speck at that distance. She looked like a dead leaf. But she poured out her song in a great flood of rejoicing through the whole forest. And everything began to stir. The finches warbled, the little red-throat and the goldfinch were heard. The doves rushed from place to place with a

loud clapping and rustling of wings. The pheasants cackled as though their throats would burst. The noise of their wings, as they flew from their roosts to the ground, was soft but powerful. They kept uttering their metallic, splintering call with its soft ensuing chuckle. Far above the falcons cried sharply and joyously, "Yayaya!"

The sun rose.

"Diu diyu!" the yellow-bird rejoiced. He flew to and fro among the branches, and his round, yellow body flashed in the morning light like a winged ball of gold.

Bambi walked under the great oak on the meadow. It sparkled with dew. It smelled of grass and flowers and moist earth, and whispered of a thousand living things. Friend Hare was there and seemed to be thinking over something important. A haughty pheasant strutted slowly by, nibbling at the grass seeds and peering cautiously in all directions. The dark, metallic blue on his neck gleamed in the sun.

One of the Princes was standing close to Bambi. Bambi had never seen any of the fathers so close before. The stag was standing right in front of him next to the hazel bush and was somewhat hidden by the branches. Bambi did not move. He wanted the Prince to come out completely, and was wondering whether he dared speak to him. He wanted to ask his mother and looked around for her. But his mother had already gone away and was standing some distance off, beside Aunt Ena. At the same time Gobo and Faline came running out of the woods. Bambi was still thinking it over without stirring. If he went up to his mother and the others now he

would have to pass by the Prince. He felt as if he couldn't do it.

“O, well,” he thought, “I don't have to ask my mother first. The old Prince spoke to me and I didn't tell mother anything about it. I'll say, 'Good morning, Prince.' He can't be offended at that. But if he does get angry, I'll run away fast. Bambi struggled with his resolve which began to waver again.

Presently the Prince walked out from behind the hazel bush onto the meadow.

“Now,” thought Bambi.

Then there was a crash like thunder.

Bambi shrank together and didn't know what had happened. He saw the Prince leap into the air under his very nose and watched him rush past him into the forest with one great bound.

Bambi looked around in a daze. The thunder still vibrated. He saw how his mother and Aunt Ena, Gobo and Faline fled into the woods. He saw how Friend Hare scurried away like mad. He saw the pheasant running with his neck outstretched. He noticed that the forest grew suddenly still. He started and sprang into the thicket. He had made only a few bounds when he saw the Prince lying on the ground in front of him, motionless. Bambi stopped horrified, not understanding what it meant. The Prince lay bleeding from a great wound in his shoulder. He was dead.

“Don't stop!” a voice beside him commanded. It was his mother who rushed past him at full gallop. “Run,” she cried. “Run as fast as you can!” She did not slow up, but raced ahead, and her command

brought Bambi after her. He ran with all his might.

“What is it, Mother?” he asked. “What is it, Mother?”

His mother answered between gasps, “It—was—He!”

Bambi shuddered and they ran on. At last they stopped for lack of breath.

“What did you say? Tell me, what it was you said,” a soft voice called down from overhead. Bambi looked up. The squirrel came chattering through the branches.

“I ran the whole way with you,” he cried. “It was dreadful.”

“Were you there?” asked the mother.

“Of course I was there,” the squirrel replied. “I am still trembling in every limb. He sat erect, balancing with his splendid tail, displaying his small white chest, and holding his forepaws protestingly against his body. “I’m beside myself with excitement,” he said.

“I’m quite weak from fright myself,” said the mother. “I don’t understand it. Not one of us saw a thing.”

“Is that so?” the squirrel said pettishly. “I saw Him long before.”

“So did I,” another voice cried. It was the magpie. She flew past and settled on a branch.

“So did I,” came a croak from above. It was the jay, who was sitting on an ash.

A couple of crows in the tree-tops cawed harshly, "We saw Him, too."

They all sat around talking importantly. They were unusually excited and seemed to be full of anger and fear.

"Whom?" Bambi thought. "Whom did they see?"

"I tried my best," the squirrel was saying, pressing his forepaws protestingly against his heart. "I tried my best to warn the poor Prince."

"And I," the jay rasped. "How often did I scream? But he didn't care to hear me."

"He didn't hear me either," the magpie croaked. "I called him at least ten times. I wanted to fly right past him, for, thought I, he hasn't heard me yet; I'll fly to the hazel bush where he's standing. He can't help hearing me there. But at that minute it happened."

"My voice is probably louder than yours, and I warned him as well as I could," the crow said in an impudent tone. "But gentlemen of that stamp pay little attention to the likes of us."

"Much too little, really," the squirrel agreed.

"Well, we did what we could," said the magpie. "We're certainly not to blame when an accident happens."

"Such a handsome Prince," the squirrel lamented. "And in the very prime of life."

"Akh!" croaked the jay. "It would have been better for him if

he hadn't been so proud and had paid more attention to us.”

“He certainly wasn't proud.”

“No more so than the other Princes of his family,” the magpie put in.

“Just plain stupid,” sneered the jay.

“You're stupid yourself,” the crow cried down from overhead. “Don't you talk about stupidity. The whole forest knows how stupid you are.”

“I!” replied the jay, stiff with astonishment. “Nobody can accuse me of being stupid. I may be forgetful but I'm certainly not stupid.”

“O, just as you please,” said the crow solemnly. “Forget what I said to you, but remember that the Prince did not die because he was proud or stupid, but because no one can escape Him.”

“Akh!” croaked the jay. “I don't like that kind of talk.” He flew away.

The crow went on, “He has already outwitted many of my family. He kills what He wants. Nothing can help us.”

“You have to be on your guard against Him,” the magpie broke in.

“You certainly do,” said the crow sadly. “Good-by.” He flew off, his family accompanying him.

Bambi looked around. His mother was no longer there.

“What are they talking about now?” thought Bambi. “I can't understand what they are talking about. Who is this 'He' they talk about? That was He, too, that I saw in the bushes, but He didn't kill me.”

Bambi thought of the Prince lying in front of him with his bloody, mangled shoulder. He was dead now. Bambi walked along. The forest sang again with a thousand voices, the sun pierced the tree-tops with its broad rays. There was light everywhere. The leaves began to smell. Far above the falcons called, close at hand a woodpecker hammered as if nothing had happened. Bambi was not happy. He felt himself threatened by something dark. He did not understand how the others could be so carefree and happy while life was so difficult and dangerous. Then the desire seized him to go deeper and deeper into the woods. They lured him into their depths. He wanted to find some hiding place where, shielded on all sides by impenetrable thickets, he could never be seen. He never wanted to go to the meadow again.

Something moved very softly in the bushes. Bambi drew back violently. The old stag was standing in front of him.

Bambi trembled. He wanted to run away, but he controlled himself and remained. The old stag looked at him with his great deep eyes and asked, “Were you out there before?”

“Yes,” Bambi said softly. His heart was pounding in his throat.

“Where is your mother?” asked the stag.

Bambi answered still very softly, “I don't know.”

The old stag kept gazing at him. "And still you're not calling for her?" he said.

Bambi looked into the noble, iron-gray face, looked at the stag's antlers and suddenly felt full of courage. "I can stay by myself, too," he said.

The old stag considered him for a while; then he asked gently, "Aren't you the little one that was crying for his mother not long ago?"

Bambi was somewhat embarrassed, but his courage held. "Yes I am," he confessed.

The old stag looked at him in silence and it seemed to Bambi as if those deep eyes gazed still more mildly. "You scolded me then, Prince," he cried excitedly, "because I was afraid of being left alone. Since then I haven't been."

The stag looked at Bambi appraisingly and smiled a very slight, hardly noticeable smile. Bambi noticed it however. "Noble Prince," he asked confidently, "what has happened? I don't understand it. Who is this 'He' they are all talking about?" He stopped, terrified by the dark glance that bade him be silent.

Another pause ensued. The old stag was gazing past Bambi into the distance. Then he said slowly, "Listen, smell and see for yourself. Find out for yourself." He lifted his antlered head still higher. "Farewell," he said, nothing else. Then he vanished.

Bambi stood transfixed and wanted to cry. But that farewell still rang in his ears and sustained him. Farewell, the old stag had

said, so he couldn't have been angry.

Bambi felt himself thrill with pride, felt inspired with a deep earnestness. Yes, life was difficult and full of danger. But come what might he would learn to bear it all.

He walked slowly deeper into the forest.

CHAPTER VIII

The leaves were falling from the great oak at the meadow's edge. They were falling from all the trees.

One branch of the oak reached high above the others and stretched far out over the meadow. Two leaves clung to its very tip.

"It isn't the way it used to be," said one leaf to the other.

"No," the other leaf answered. "So many of us have fallen off to-night, we're almost the only ones left on our branch."

"You never know who's going to go next," said the first leaf. "Even when it was warm and the sun shone, a storm or a cloudburst would come sometimes, and many leaves were torn off, though they were still young. You never know who's going to go next."

"The sun seldom shines now," sighed the second leaf, "and when it does it gives no warmth. We must have warmth again."

"Can it be true," said the first leaf, "can it really be true, that others come to take our places when we're gone and after them still other, and more and more?"

"It is really true," whispered the second leaf. "We can't even begin to imagine it, it's beyond our powers."

"It makes me very sad," added the first leaf.

They were silent a while. Then the first leaf said quietly to

herself, “Why must we fall?...”

The second leaf asked, “What happens to us when we have fallen?”

“We sink down....”

“What is under us?”

The first leaf answered, “I don't know, some say one thing, some another, but nobody knows.”

The second leaf asked, “Do we feel anything, do we know anything about ourselves when we're down there?”

The first leaf answered, “Who knows? Not one of all those down there has ever come back to tell us about it.”

They were silent again. Then the first leaf said tenderly to the other, “Don't worry so much about it, you're trembling.”

“That's nothing,” the second leaf answered, “I tremble at the least thing now. I don't feel so sure of my hold as I used to.”

“Let's not talk any more about such things,” said the first leaf.

The other replied, “No, we'll let be. But—what else shall we talk about?” She was silent, but went on after a little while, “Which of us will go first?”

“There's still plenty of time to worry about that,” the other leaf assured her. “Let's remember how beautiful it was, how wonderful, when the sun came out and shone so warmly that we thought we'd burst with life. Do you remember? And the morning dew, and the

mild and splendid nights....”

“Now the nights are dreadful,” the second leaf complained, “and there is no end to them.”

“We shouldn't complain,” said the first leaf gently. “We've outlived many, many others.”

“Have I changed much?” asked the second leaf shyly but determinedly.

“Not in the least,” the first leaf assured her. “You only think so because I've got to be so yellow and ugly. But it's different in your case.”

“You're fooling me,” the second leaf said.

“No, really,” the first leaf exclaimed eagerly, “believe me, you're as lovely as the day you were born. Here and there may be a little yellow spot but it's hardly noticeable and only makes you handsomer, believe me.”

“Thanks,” whispered the second leaf, quite touched. “I don't believe you, not altogether, but I thank you because you're so kind, you're always been so kind to me. I'm just beginning to understand how kind you are.”

“Hush,” said the other leaf, and kept silent herself for she was too troubled to talk any more.

Then they were both silent. Hours passed.

A moist wind blew, cold and hostile, through the tree-tops.

“Ah, now,” said the second leaf, “I...” Then her voice broke off. She was torn from her place and spun down.

Winter had come.

CHAPTER IX

Bambi noticed that the world was changed. It was hard for him to get used to this altered world. They had all lived like rich folk and now had fallen upon hard times. For Bambi knew nothing but abundance. He took it for granted that he would always have plenty to eat. He thought he would never need to trouble about food. He believed he would always sleep in the lovely green-leafed glade where no one could see him, and would always go about in his smooth, handsome, glossy red coat.

Now everything was changed without his having noticed the change take place. The process that was ending had seemed only a series of episodes to him. It pleased him to see the milk-white veils of mist steam from the meadow in the morning, or drop suddenly from the gray sky at dawn. They vanished so beautifully in the sunshine. The hoar frost that covered the meadow with such dazzling whiteness delighted him too. Sometimes he liked to listen to his big cousins the elks. The whole forest would tremble with their kingly voices. Bambi used to listen and be very much frightened, but his heart would beat high with admiration when he heard them calling. He remembered that the kings had antlers branching like tall, strong trees. And it seemed to him that their voices were as powerful as their antlers. Whenever he heard the deep tones of those voices he would stand motionless. Their deep voices rolled towards him like the mighty moaning of noble, maddened blood whose primal power was giving utterance to longing, rage and pride. Bambi struggled in vain against his fears.

They overpowered him whenever he heard those voices, but he was proud to have such noble relatives. At the same time he felt a strange sense of annoyance because they were so unapproachable. It offended and humiliated him without his knowing exactly how or why, even without his being particularly conscious of it.

It was only after the mating season had passed and the thunder of the stags' mighty voices had grown still, that Bambi began to notice other things once more. At night when he roamed through the forest or by day as he lay in the glade, he heard the falling leaves whisper among the trees. They fluttered and rustled ceaselessly through the air from all the tree-tops and branches. A delicate silvery sound was falling constantly to earth. It was wonderful to awaken amidst it, wonderful to fall asleep to this mysterious and melancholy whispering. Soon the leaves lay thick and loose on the ground and when you walked through them they flew about, softly rustling. It was jolly to push them aside with every step, they were piled so high. It made a sound like "Sh! sh!"—soft and very clear and silvery. Besides, it was very useful, for Bambi had to be particularly careful these days to hear and smell everything. And with the leaves you could hear everything far off. They rustled at the slightest touch and cried, "Sh! sh!" Nobody could steal through them.

But then the rain came. It poured down from early morning till late at night. Sometimes it rained all night long and into the following day. It would stop for a while and begin again with fresh strength. The air was damp and cold, the whole world seemed full of rain. If you tried to nibble a little meadow grass you got your mouth full of water, or if you tugged the least little bit at a bough a

whole torrent of water poured into your eyes and nose. The leaves no longer rustled. They lay pale and soggy on the ground, flattened by the rain, and made no sounds. Bambi discovered for the first time how unpleasant it is to be rained on all day and all night until you are soaked to the skin. There had not even been a frost yet, but he longed for the warm weather and felt it was a sad business to have to run around soaked through.

But when the north wind blew, Bambi found out what cold is. It wasn't much help to nestle close to his mother. Of course at first he thought it was wonderful to lie there and keep one side warm at least. But the north wind raged through the forest all day and all night long. It seemed to be driven to madness by some incomprehensible ice-cold fury, as though it wanted to tear up the forest by its roots or annihilate it somehow." The trees groaned in stubborn resistance, they struggled mightily against the wind's fierce onslaught. You could hear their long-drawn moans, their sigh-like creakings, the loud snap when their strong limbs split, the angry cracking when now and again a trunk broke and the vanquished tree seemed to shriek from every wound in its rent and dying body. Nothing else could be heard, for the storm swooped down still more fiercely on the forest, and its roaring drowned all lesser noises.

Then Bambi knew that want and hardship had come. He saw how much the rain and wind had changed the world. There was no longer a leaf on tree or shrub. But all stood there as though violated, their bodies naked for all to see. And they lifted their bare brown limbs to the sky for pity. The grass on the meadow was withered and shortened, as if it had sunk into the earth. Even the

glade seemed wretched and bare. Since the leaves had fallen it was no longer possible to lie so well hidden as before. The glade was open on all sides.

One day, as a young magpie flew over the meadow, something cold and white fell in her eye. Then it fell again and again. She felt as if a little veil were drawn across her eye while the small, pale, blinding white flakes danced around her. The magpie hesitated in her flight, fluttered a little, and then soared straight up into the air. In vain. The cold white flakes were everywhere and got into her eyes again. She kept flying straight up, soaring higher.

“Don't put yourself out so much, dearie,” a crow who was flying above her in the same direction called down, “don't put yourself out so much. You can't fly high enough to get outside these flakes. This is snow.”

“Snow!” cried the magpie in surprise, struggling against the drizzle.

“That's about the size of it,” said the crow, “it's winter, and this is snow.”

“Excuse me,” the magpie replied, “but I only left the nest in May. I don't know anything about winter.”

“There are plenty in the same boat,” the crow remarked, “but you'll soon find out.”

“Well,” said the magpie, “if this is snow I guess I'll sit down for a while.” She perched on an elder and shook herself. The crow flew awkwardly away.

At first Bambi was delighted with the snow. The air was calm and mild while the white snow stars whirled down and the world looked completely different. It had grown lighter, gayer, Bambi thought, and whenever the sun came out for a little while everything shone and the white covering flashed and sparkled so brightly that it blinded you.

But Bambi soon stopped being pleased with the snow. For it grew harder and harder to find food. He had to paw the snow away with endless labor before he could find one withered little blade of grass. The snow crust cut his legs and he was afraid of cutting his feet. Gobo had already cut his. Of course Gobo was the kind who couldn't stand anything and was a constant source of trouble to his mother.

The deer were always together now and were much more friendly than before. Ena brought her children constantly. Lately Marena, a half-grown doe, had joined the circle. But old Nettla really contributed most to their entertainment. She was quite a self-sufficient person and had her own ideas about everything. "No," she would say, "I don't bother with children any more. I've had enough of that particular joke."

Faline asked, "What difference does it make, if they're a joke?" And Nettla would act as if she were angry, and say, "They're a bad joke, though, and I've had enough of them."

They got along perfectly together. They would sit side by side gossiping. The young ones had never had a chance to hear so much.

Even one or another of the Princes would join them now. At

first things went somewhat stiffly, especially since the children were a little shy. But that soon changed, and they got along very well together. Bambi admired Prince Ronno, who was a stately lord, and he passionately loved the handsome young Karus. They had dropped their horns and Bambi often looked at the two slate-gray round spots that showed smooth and shimmering with many delicate points on the Princes' heads. They looked very noble.

It was terribly interesting whenever one of the Princes talked about Him. Ronno had a thick hide-covered swelling on his left fore-foot. He limped on that foot and used to ask sometimes, "Can you really see that I limp?" Everyone would hasten to assure him that there was not the trace of a limp. That was what Ronno wanted. And it really was hardly noticeable.

"Yes," he would go on. "I saved myself from a tight corner that time." And then Ronno would tell how He had surprised him and hurled His fire at him. But it had only struck his leg. It had driven him nearly mad with pain, and no wonder, since the bone was shattered. But Ronno did not lose his head. He was up and away on three legs. He pressed on in spite of his weakness for he saw that he was being pursued. He ran without stopping until night came. Then he gave himself a rest. But he went on the next morning until he felt he was in safety. Then he took care of himself, living alone in hiding, waiting for his wound to heal. At last he came out again and was a hero. He limped, but he thought no one noticed it.

They were often together now for long periods and told many stories. Bambi heard more about Him than ever before. They told how terrible He was to look at. No one could bear to look at His pale face. Bambi knew that already from his own experience. They

spoke too about His smell, and again Bambi could have spoken if he had not been too well brought up to mix in his elders' conversation. They said that His smell differed each time in a hundred subtle ways and yet you could tell it in an instant, for it was always exciting, unfathomable, mysterious and terrible.

They told how He used only two legs to walk with and they spoke of the amazing strength of His two hands. Some of them did not know what hands were. But when it was explained, old Nettla said, "I don't see anything so surprising in that. A squirrel can do everything you tell about just as well, and every little mouse can perform the same wonders." She turned away her head disdainfully.

"O, no," cried the others, and they gave her to understand that those were not the same things at all. But old Nettla was not to be cowed. "What about the falcon?" she exclaimed. "And the buzzard? And the owl? They've got only two legs and when they want to catch something they simply stand on one leg and grab with the other. That's much harder and he certainly can't do that."

Old Nettla was not at all inclined to admire anything connected with Him. She hated Him with all her heart. "He is loathsome!" she said, and she stuck to that. Besides, nobody contradicted her, since nobody liked Him.

But the talk grew more complicated when they told how He had a third hand, not two hands merely, but a third hand.

"That's an old story," Nettla said curtly, "I don't believe it."

"Is that so?" Ronno broke in. "Then what did He shatter my leg with? Can you tell me that?"

Old Nettla answered carelessly, "That's your affair, my dear, He's never shattered any of mine."

Aunt Ena said, "I've seen a good deal in my time, and I think there's something in the story that He has a third hand."

"I agree with you," young Karus said politely. "I have a friend, a crow..." He paused, embarrassed for a moment, and looked around at them, one after the other, as though he were afraid of being laughed at. But when he saw that they were listening attentively to him he went on. "This crow is unusually well informed, I must say that. Surprisingly well informed. And she says that He really has three hands, but not always. The third hand is the bad one, the crow says. It isn't attached like the other two, but He carries it hanging over His shoulder. The crow says that she can always tell exactly when He, or anyone like Him, is going to be dangerous. If He comes without the third hand He isn't dangerous."

Old Nettla laughed. "Your crow's a blockhead, my dear Karus," she said. "Tell her so for me. If she were as clever as she thinks she is, she'd know that He's always dangerous, always." But the others had different objections.

Bambi's mother said, "Some of Them aren't dangerous; you can see that at a glance."

"Is that so?" old Nettla asked. "I suppose you stand still till They come up to you and wish you a good day?"

Bambi's mother answered gently. "Of course I don't stand still; I run away."

And Faline broke in with, "You should always run away." Everybody laughed.

But when they talked about the third hand they became serious and fear grew on them gradually. For whatever it might be, a third hand or something else, it was terrible and they did not understand it. They only knew of it from others' stories, few of them had ever seen it for themselves. He would stand still, far off, and never move. You couldn't explain what He did or how it happened, but suddenly there would be a crash like thunder, fire would shoot out and far away from Him you would drop down dying with your breast torn open. They all sat bowed while they talked about Him, as though they felt the presence of some dark, unknown power controlling them.

They listened curiously to the many stories that were always horrible, full of blood and suffering. They listened tirelessly to everything that was said about Him, tales that were certainly invented, all the stories and sayings that had come down from their fathers and great-grandfathers. In each one of them they were unconsciously seeking for some way to propitiate this dark power, or some way to escape it.

"What difference does it make," young Karus asked quite despondently, "how far away He is when He kills you?"

"Didn't your clever crow explain that to you?" old Nettla mocked.

"No," said Karus with a smile. "She says that she's often seen Him but no one can explain Him."

“Yes, He knocks the crows out of the trees, too, when He wants to,” Ronno observed.

“And He brings down the pheasant on the wing,” Aunt Ena added.

Bambi's mother said, “He throws His hand at you, my grandmother told me so.”

“Is that so?’ asked old Nettla. “What is it that bangs so terribly then?”

“That's when He tears His hand off,” Bambi's mother explained. “Then the fire flashes and the thunder cracks. He's all fire inside.”

“Excuse me,” said Ronno. “It's true that He's all fire inside. But that about His hand is wrong. A hand couldn't make such wounds. You can see that for yourself. It's much more likely that it's a tooth He throws at us. A tooth would explain a great many things, you know. You really die from His bite.”

“Will He never stop hunting us?” young Karus sighed.

Then Marena spoke, the young half-grown doe. “They say that sometime He'll come to live with us and be as gentle as we are. He'll play with us then and the whole forest will be happy, and we'll be friends with Him.”

Old Nettla burst out laughing. “Let Him stay where He is and leave us in peace,” she said.

Aunt Ena said reprovingly, “You shouldn't talk that way.”

“And why not?” old Nettla replied hotly, “I really don't see why not. Friends with Him! He's murdered us ever since we can remember, everyone of us, our sisters, our mothers, our brothers! Ever since we came into the world He's given us no peace, but has killed us wherever we showed our heads. And now we're going to be friends with Him! What nonsense!”

Marena looked at all of them out of her big, calm, shining eyes. “Love is no nonsense,” she said. “It has to come.”

Old Nettla turned away. “I'm going to look for something to eat,” she said, and trotted off.

CHAPTER X

Winter dragged on. Sometimes it was warmer, but then the snow would fall again and lie deeper and deeper, so that it became impossible to scrape it away. It was worst when the thaws came and the melted snow water froze again in the night. Then there was a thin slippery film of ice. Often it broke in pieces and the sharp splinters cut the deer's tender fetlocks till they bled.

A heavy frost had set in several days before. The air was purer and rarer than it had ever been, and full of energy. It began to hum in a very fine high tone. It hummed with the cold.

It was silent in the woods, but something horrible happened every day. Once the crows fell upon Friend Hare's small son who was lying sick, and killed him in a cruel way. He could be heard moaning pitifully for a long while. Friend Hare was not at home, and when he heard the sad news he was beside himself with grief.

Another time the squirrel raced about with a great wound in his neck where the ferret had caught him. By a miracle the squirrel had escaped. He could not talk because of the pain, but he ran up and down the branches. Everyone could see him. He ran like mad. From time to time he stopped, sat down, raised his forepaws desperately and clutched his head in terror and agony while the red blood oozed on his white chest. He ran about for an hour, then suddenly crumpled up, fell across a branch, and dropped dead in the snow. A couple of magpies flew down at once to begin their meal.

Another day a fox tore to pieces the strong and handsome pheasant who had enjoyed such general respect and popularity. His death aroused the sympathies of a wide circle who tried to comfort his disconsolate widow.

The fox had dragged the pheasant out of the snow, where he was buried, thinking himself well hidden. No one could have felt safer than the pheasant for it all happened in broad daylight. The terrible hardship that seemed to have no end spread bitterness and brutality. It destroyed all their memories of the past, their faith in each other, and ruined every good custom they had. There was no longer either peace or mercy in the forest.

"It's hard to believe that it will ever be better," Bambi's mother sighed.

Aunt Ena sighed too. "It's hard to believe that it was ever any better," she said.

"And yet," Marena said, looking in front of her, "I always think how beautiful it was before."

"Look," old Nettla said to Aunt Ena, "your little one is trembling." She pointed to Gobo. "Does he always tremble like that?"

"Yes," Aunt Ena answered gravely, "he's shivered that way for the last few days."

"Well," said old Nettla in her frank way, "I'm glad that I have no more children. If that little one were mine I'd wonder if he'd last out the winter."

The future really didn't look very bright for Gobo. He was weak. He had always been much more delicate than Bambi or Faline and remained smaller than either of them. He was growing worse from day to day. He could not eat even the little food there was. It made his stomach ache. And he was quite exhausted by the cold, and by the horrors around him. He shivered more and more and could hardly stand up. Everyone looked at him sympathetically.

Old Nettla went up to him and nudged him good-naturedly. "Don't be so sad," she said encouragingly, "that's no way for a little Prince to act, and besides it's unhealthy." She turned away so that no one should see how moved she was.

Ronno, who had settled himself a little to one side in the snow, suddenly sprang up. "I don't know what it is," he mumbled and gazed around.

Everyone grew watchful. "What is it?" they asked.

"I don't know," Ronno repeated. "But I'm restless. I suddenly felt restless as if something were wrong."

Karus was snuffing the air. "I don't smell anything strange," he declared.

They all stood still, listening and snuffing the air. "It's nothing, there's absolutely nothing to smell," they agreed one after another.

"Nevertheless," Ronno insisted, "you can say what you like, something is wrong."

Marena said, "The crows are calling."

“There they go calling again,” Faline added quickly, but the others had already heard them.

“They are flying,” said Karus and the others.

Everybody looked up. High above the tree-tops a flock of crows flapped by. They came from the farthest edge of the forest, the direction from which danger always came, and they were complaining to one another. Apparently something unusual had happened.

“Wasn't I right?” asked Ronno. “You can see that something is happening.”

“What shall we do?” Bambi's mother whispered anxiously.

“Let's get away,” Aunt Ena urged in alarm.

“Wait.” Ronno commanded.

“But the children,” Aunt Ena replied, “the children. Gobo can't run.”

“Go ahead,” Ronno agreed, “go off with your children, I don't think there's any need for it, but I don't blame you for going.” He was alert and serious.

“Come, Gobo. Come, Faline. Softly now, go slowly. And keep behind me,” Aunt Ena warned them. She slipped away with the children.

Time passed. They stood still, listening and trembling.

“As if we hadn't suffered enough already,” old Nettla began.

“We still have this to go through....” She was very angry. Bambi looked at her, and he felt that she was thinking of something horrible.

Three or four magpies had already begun to chatter on the side of the thicket from which the crows had come. “Look out! Look out, out, out!” they cried. The deer could not see them, but could hear them calling and warning each other. Sometimes one of them, and sometimes all of them together, would cry, “Look out, out, out!” Then they came nearer. They fluttered in terror from tree to tree, peered back and fluttered away again in fear and alarm.

“Akh!” cried the jays. They screamed their warning loudly.

Suddenly all the deer shrank together at once as though a blow had struck them. Then they stood still snuffing the air.

It was He.

A heavy wave of scent blew past. There was nothing they could do. The scent filled their nostrils, it numbed their senses and made their hearts stop beating.

The magpies were still chattering. The jays were still screaming overhead. In the woods around them everything had sprung to life. The titmice flitted through the branches, like tiny feathered balls, chirping, “Run! run!”

The blackbirds fled swiftly and darkly above them with long-drawn twittering cries. Through the dark tangle of bare bushes, they saw on the white snow a wild aimless scurrying of smaller, shadowy creatures. These were the pheasants. Then a flash of red

streaked by. That was the fox. But no one was afraid of him now. For that fearful scent kept streaming on in a wider wave, sending terror into their hearts and uniting them all in one mad fear, in a single feverish impulse to flee, to save themselves.

That mysterious overpowering scent filled the woods with such strength that they knew that this time He was not alone, but had come with many others, and there would be no end to the killing.

They did not move. They looked at the titmice, whisking away in a sudden flutter, at the blackbirds and the squirrels who dashed from tree-top to tree-top in mad bounds. They knew that all the little creatures on the grounds had nothing to fear. But they understood their flight when they smelt Him, for no forest creature could bear His presence.

Presently Friend Hare hopped up. He hesitated, sat still and then hopped on again.

“What is it?” Karus called after him impatiently.

But Friend Hare only looked around with bewildered eyes and could not even speak. He was completely terrified.

“What's the use of asking?” said Ronno gloomily.

Friend Hare gasped for breath. “We are surrounded,” he said in a lifeless voice. “We can't escape on any side. He is everywhere.”

At the same instant they heard His voice. Twenty or thirty strong, He cried, “Ho! ho! Ha! ha!” It roared like the sound of winds and storms. He beat on the tree trunks as though they were drums. It was wracking and terrifying. A distant twisting and rending of

parted bushes rang out. There was a snapping and cracking of broken boughs.

He was coming.

He was coming into the heart of the thicket.

Then short whistling flute-like trills sounded together with the loud flap of soaring wings. A pheasant rose from under His very feet. The deer heard the wing-beats of the pheasant grow fainter as he mounted into the air. There was a loud crash like thunder. Then silence. Then a dull thud on the ground.

“He is dead,” said Bambi's mother, trembling.

“The first,” Ronno added.

The young doe, Marena, said, “In this very hour many of us are going to die. Perhaps I shall be one of them.” No one listened to her, for a mad terror had seized them all.

Bambi tried to think. But His savage noises grew louder and louder and paralyzed Bambi's senses. He heard nothing but those noises. They numbed him while amidst the howling, shouting and crashing he could hear his own heart pounding. He felt nothing but curiosity and did not even realize that he was trembling in every limb. From time to time his mother whispered in his ear, “Stay close to me.” She was shouting, but in the uproar it sounded to Bambi as if she were whispering. Her “Stay close to me” encouraged him. It was like a chain holding him. Without it he would have rushed off senselessly, and he heard it at the very moment when his wits were wandering and he wanted to dash away.

He looked around. All sorts of creatures were swarming past, scampering blindly over one another. A pair of weasels ran by like thin snake-like streaks. The eye could scarcely follow them. A ferret listened as though bewitched to every shriek that desperate Friend Hare let out.

A fox was standing in a whole flurry of fluttering pheasants. They paid no attention to him. They ran right under his nose and he paid no attention to them. Motionless, with his head thrust forward, he listened to the onrushing tumult, lifting his pointed ears, and snuffed the air with his nose. Only his tail moved, slowly wagging with his intense concentration.

A pheasant dashed up. He had come from where the danger was worst and was beside himself with fear.

“Don't try to fly,” he shouted to the others. “Don't fly, just run! Don't lose your head! Don't try to fly! Just run, run, run!”

He kept repeating the same thing over and over again as though to encourage himself. But he no longer knew what he was saying.

“Ho! ho! Ha! ha!” came the death cry, from quite near apparently.

“Don't lose your head,” screamed the pheasant. And at the same time his voice broke in a whistling gasp and, spreading his wings, he flew up with a loud whir. Bambi watched how he flew straight up, directly between the trees, beating his wings. The dark metallic blue and greenish-brown markings on his body gleamed like gold. His long tail feathers swept proudly behind him. A short

crash like thunder sounded sharply. The pheasant suddenly crumpled up in mid-flight. He turned head over tail as though he wanted to catch his claws with his beak, and then dropped violently to earth. He fell among the others and did not move again.

Then everyone lost his senses. They all rushed toward one another. Five or six pheasants rose at one time with a loud whirl. "Don't fly," cried the rest and ran. The thunder cracked five or six times and more of the flying birds dropped lifeless to the ground.

"Come," said Bambi's mother. Bambi looked around, Ronno and Karus had already fled. Old Nettla was disappearing. Only Marena was still beside them. Bambi went with his mother, Marena following them timidly. All around them was a roaring and shouting, and the thunder was crashing. Bambi's mother was calm. She trembled quietly, but she kept her wits together.

"Bambi, my child," she said, "keep behind me all the time. We'll have to get out of here and across the open place. But now we'll go slowly."

The din was maddening. The thunder crashed ten, twelve times as He hurled it from His hands.

"Watch out," said Bambi's mother. "Don't run. But when we have to cross the open place, run as fast as you can. And don't forget, Bambi, my child, don't pay any attention to me when we get out there. Even if I fall, don't pay any attention to me, just keep on running. Do you understand, Bambi?"

His mother walked carefully step by step amidst the uproar. The pheasants were running up and down, burying themselves in

the snow. Suddenly they would spring out and begin to run again. The whole Hare family was hopping to and fro, squatting down and then hopping again. No one said a word. They were all spent with terror and numbed by the din and thunderclaps.

It grew lighter in front of Bambi and his mother. The clearing showed through the bushes.

Behind them the terrifying drumming on the tree trunks came crashing nearer and nearer. The breaking branches snapped. There was a roaring of "Ha, ha! Ho, ho!"

Then Friend Hare and two of his cousins rushed past them across the clearing. Bing! Ping! Bang! roared the thunder. Bambi saw how Friend Hare struck an elder in the middle of his flight and lay with his white belly turned upward. He quivered a little and then was still. Bambi stood petrified. But from behind him came the cry, "Here they are! Run! Run!"

There was a loud clapping of wings suddenly opened. There were gasps, sobs, showers of feathers, flutterings. The pheasants took wing and the whole flock rose almost at one instant. The air was throbbing with repeated thunderclaps and the dull thuds of the fallen and the high, piercing shrieks of those who had escaped.

Bambi heard steps and looked behind him. He was there. He came bursting through the bushes on all sides. He sprang up everywhere, struck about him, beat the bushes, drummed on the tree trunks and shouted with a fiendish voice.

"Now," said Bambi's mother. "Get away from here. And don't stay too close to me." She was off with a bound that barely

skimmed the snow. Bambi rushed out after her. The thunder crashed around them on all sides. It seemed as if the earth would split in half. Bambi saw nothing. He kept running. A growing desire to get away from the tumult and out of reach of that scent which seemed to strangle him, the growing impulse to flee, the longing to save himself were loosed in him at last. He ran. It seemed to him as if he saw his mother hit but he did not know if it was really she or not. He felt a film come over his eyes from fear of the thunder crashing behind him. It had gripped him completely at last. He could think of nothing or see nothing around him. He kept running.

The open space was crossed. Another thicket took him in. The hue and cry still rang behind him. The sharp reports still thundered. And in the branches above him there was a light pattering like the first fall of hail. Then it grew quieter. Bambi kept running.

A dying pheasant, with its neck twisted, lay on the snow, beating feebly with its wings. When he heard Bambi coming he ceased his convulsive movements and whispered, "It's all over with me." Bambi paid no attention to him and ran on.

A tangle of bushes he blundered into forced him to slacken his pace and look for a path. He pawed the ground impatiently with his hoofs. "This way!" called someone with a gasping voice. Bambi obeyed involuntarily and found an opening at once. Someone moved feebly in front of him. It was Friend Hare's wife who had called.

"Can you help me a little?" she said. Bambi looked at her and shuddered. Her hind leg dangled lifelessly in the snow, dyeing it red and melting it with warm, oozing blood. "Can you help me a little?"

she repeated. She spoke as if she were well and whole, almost as if she were happy. "I don't know what can have happened to me," she went on. "There's really no sense to it, but I just can't seem to walk...."

In the middle of her words she rolled over on her side and died. Bambi was seized with horror again and ran.

"Bambi!"

He stopped with a jolt. A deer was calling him. Again he heard the cry. "Is that you, Bambi?"

Bambi saw Gobo floundering helplessly in the snow. All his strength was gone; he could no longer stand on his feet. He lay there half buried and lifted his head feebly. Bambi went up to him excitedly.

"Where's your mother, Gobo?" he asked, gasping for breath. "Where's Faline?" Bambi spoke quickly and impatiently. Terror still gripped his heart.

"Mother and Faline had to go on," Gobo answered resignedly. He spoke softly, but as seriously and as well as a grown deer. "They had to leave me here. I fell down. You must go on, too, Bambi."

"Get up," cried Bambi. "Get up, Gobo! You've rested long enough. There's not a minute to lose now. Get up and come with me!"

"No, leave me," Gobo answered quietly. "I can't stand up. It's impossible. I'd like to, but I'm too weak."

“What will happen to you?” Bambi persisted.

“I don't know. Probably I'll die,” said Gobo simply.

The uproar began again and re-echoed. New crashes of thunder followed. Bambi shrank together. Suddenly a branch snapped. Young Karus pounded swiftly through the snow, galloping ahead of the din.

“Run,” he called when he saw Bambi. “Don't stand there if you can run!” He was gone in a flash and his headlong flight carried Bambi along with it. Bambi was hardly aware that he had begun to run again and only after an interval did he say, “Good-by, Gobo.” But he was already too far away. Gobo could no longer hear him.

He ran till nightfall through the woods that was filled with shouting and thunder. As darkness closed in, it grew quiet. Soon a light wind carried away the horrible scent that spread everywhere. But the excitement remained.

The first friend whom Bambi saw again was Ronno. He was limping more than ever.

“Over in the oak grove the fox has a burning fever from his wound,” Ronno said. “I just passed him. He's suffering terribly. He keeps biting the snow and the ground.”

“Have you seen my mother?” asked Bambi.

“No,” answered Ronno evasively, and walked quickly away.

Later during the night Bambi met old Nettla with Faline. All three were delighted to meet.

“Have you seen my mother?” asked Bambi.

“No,” Faline answered. “I don't even know where my own mother is.”

“Well,” said old Nettla cheerfully. “Here's a nice mess. I was so glad that I didn't have to bother with children any more and now I have to look after two at once. I'm heartily grateful.”

Bambi and Faline laughed.

They talked about Gobo. Bambi told how he had found him, and they grew so sad they began to cry. But old Nettla would not have them crying. “Before everything else you have got to get something to eat. I never heard of such a thing. You haven't had a bite to eat this livelong day!”

She led them to places where there were still a few leaves that had not completely withered. Old Nettla was wonderfully gentle. She ate nothing herself, but made Bambi and Faline eat heartily. She pawed away the snow from the grassy spots and ordered them to eat with, “The grass is good here.” Or else she would say, “No, wait. We'll find something better farther on.” But between whiles she would grumble, “It's perfectly ridiculous the trouble children give you.”

Suddenly they saw Aunt Ena coming and rushed towards her. “Aunt Ena,” cried Bambi. He had seen her first. Faline was beside herself with joy and bounded around her. “Mother,” she cried. But Ena was weeping and nearly dead from exhaustion.

“Gobo is gone,” she cried. “I've looked for him. I went to the

little place where he lay when he broke down in the snow... there was nothing there... he is gone... my poor little Gobo....”

Old Nettla grumbled, “If you had looked for his tracks it would have been more sensible than crying,” she said.

“There weren't any tracks,” said Aunt Ena. “But... His... tracks were there. He found Gobo.”

She was silent. Then Bambi asked despondently, “Aunt Ena, have you seen my mother?”

“No,” answered Aunt Ena gently.

Bambi never saw his mother again.

CHAPTER XI

At last the willows shed their catkins. Everything was turning green, but the young leaves on the trees and bushes were still tiny. Glowing with the soft, early morning light they looked fresh and smiling like children who have just awakened from sleep.

Bambi was standing in front of a hazel bush, beating his new antlers against the wood. It was very pleasant to do that. And an absolute necessity besides, since skin and hide still covered his splendid antlers. The skin had to come off, of course, and no sensible creature would ever wait until it split of its own accord. Bambi pounded his antlers till the skin split and long strips of it dangled about his ears. As he pounded on the hazel stems again and again, he felt how much stronger his antlers were than the wood. This feeling shot through him in a rush of power and pride. He beat more fiercely on the hazel bush and tore its bark into long pieces. The white body of the tree showed naked and quickly turned a rusty red in the open air. But Bambi paid no attention to that. He saw the bright wood of the tree flash under his strokes and it heartened him. A whole row of hazel bushes bore traces of his work.

“Well, you are nearly grown now,” said a cheerful voice close by.

Bambi tossed his head and looked around him. There sat the squirrel observing him in a friendly way. From overhead came a short, shrill laugh, “Ha! ha!”

Bambi and the squirrel were both half frightened. But the woodpecker who was clinging to an oak trunk called down, "Excuse me, but I always have to laugh when I see you deer acting like that."

"What is there to laugh at?" asked Bambi politely.

"O!" said the woodpecker, "you go at things in such a wrong-headed way. In the first place, you ought to try big trees, for you can't get anything out of those little wisps of hazel stalks."

"What should I get out of them?" Bambi asked.

"Bugs," said the woodpecker with a laugh. "Bugs and grubs. Look, do like this." He drummed on the oak trunk, tack! tack! tack! tack!

The squirrel rushed up and scolded him. "What are you talking about?" he said. "The Prince isn't looking for bugs and grubs."

"Why not?" said the woodpecker in high glee. "They taste fine." He bit a bug in half, swallowed it and began drumming again.

"You don't understand," the squirrel went on scolding. "A noble lord like that has far other, far higher aims. You're only casting reflection on yourself by such talk."

"It's all the same to me," answered the woodpecker. "A fig for higher aims," he cried cheerfully and fluttered away. The squirrel bustled down again.

"Don't you remember me?" he said, putting on a pleased expression.

“Very well,” answered Bambi in a friendly way. “Do you live up there?” he asked, pointing to the oak.

The squirrel looked at him good-humoredly.

“You’re mixing me up with my grandmother,” he said. “I knew you were mixing me up with her. My grandmother used to live up there when you were just a baby, Prince Bambi. She often told me about you. The ferret killed her long ago, last winter, you may remember it.”

“Yes,” Bambi nodded. “I’ve heard about it.”

“Well, afterwards my father settled here,” the squirrel went on. He sat erect and held both forepaws politely over his white chest. “But maybe you’re got me mixed up with my father, too. Did you know my father?”

“I’m sorry,” Bambi replied. “But I never had that pleasure.”

“I thought so,” the squirrel exclaimed, satisfied. “Father was so surly and so shy. He had nothing to do with anybody.”

“Where is he now?” Bambi inquired.

“O,” said the squirrel, “the owl caught him a month ago. Yes... And now I’m living up there myself. I’m quite content, since I was born up there.”

Bambi turned to go.

“Wait,” cried the squirrel quickly, “I didn’t mean to talk about all that. I wanted to say something quite different.”

Bambi stopped. "What is it?" he asked patiently.

"Yes," said the squirrel, "what is it?" He thought a little while and then gave a quick skip and sat erect, balancing with his splendid tail. He looked at Bambi. "Right you are," he chattered on. "Now I know what it was. I wanted to say that your antlers are almost grown now, and that you are going to be a remarkably handsome person."

"Do you really think so?" said Bambi joyfully.

"Remarkably handsome," cried the squirrel, and pressed his forepaws rapturously against his white chest. "So tall, so stately and with such long bright prongs to your antlers. You don't often see the like."

"Really?" Bambi asked. He was so delighted that he immediately began to beat the hazel stems again. He tore off long ribbons of bark.

All the while the squirrel kept on talking. "I must say that very few have antlers like those at your age. It doesn't seem possible. I saw you several times from a distance last summer, and I can hardly believe that you're the same creature, you were such a thin little shaver then."

Bambi suddenly grew silent. "Good-by," he said hastily. "I have to go now." And he ran off.

He didn't like to be reminded of last summer. He had had a difficult time of it since then. At first, after his mother's disappearance, he had felt quite lost. The long winter was

interminable. Spring came hesitatingly and it was late before things began to turn green. Without old Nettla Bambi might not even have pulled through at all, but she looked after him and helped him where she could. In spite of that he was alone a good deal.

He missed Gobo at every turn; poor Gobo, who was dead too, like the rest of them. Bambi thought of him often during that winter, and for the first time he really began to appreciate how good and lovable Gobo had been.

He seldom saw Faline. She stayed with her mother most of the time and seemed to have grown unusually shy. Later when it had finally grown warm Bambi began to feel his old self once more. He flourished his first antler on high and was very proud of it. But bitter disappointment soon followed.

The other bucks chased him whenever they saw him. They drove him away angrily. They would not let him come near them until finally he was afraid to take a step for fear of being caught. He was afraid to show himself anywhere and slunk along hidden trails in a very downcast frame of mind.

As the summer days grew warmer a remarkable restlessness seized him. His heart felt more and more oppressed with a sense of longing that was both pleasant and painful. Whenever he chanced to see Faline or one of her friends, though only at a distance, a rush of incomprehensible excitement crept over him. Often it happened that he recognized her track, or the air he snuffed told him she was near. Then he would feel himself irresistibly drawn towards her. But when he gave way to his desire he always came to grief. Either he met no one and, after wandering around for a long while, had to

admit that they were avoiding him, or he ran across one of the bucks, who immediately sprang at him, beat and kicked him and chased him disgracefully away. Ronno and Karus had treated him worst of all. No, that hadn't been a happy time.

And now the squirrel had stupidly reminded him of it. Suddenly he became quite wild and started to run. The titmice and hedge sparrows flitted, frightened, through the bushes as he passed, and asked each other in a fluster, "What was that?" Bambi did not hear them. A couple of magpies chattered nervously, "What happened?" The jay cried angrily, "What is the matter with you?" Bambi paid no attention to him. Overhead the yellow-bird sang from tree to tree, "Good morning, I'm ha-appy." Bambi did not answer. The thicket was very bright and shot through with sunbeams. Bambi did not stop to think about such things.

Suddenly there was a loud whirr of wings. A whole rainbow of gorgeous colors flashed from under Bambi's very feet and shone so close to his eyes that he stopped, dazzled. It was Jonello, the pheasant. He had flown up in terror, for Bambi had nearly stepped on him. He fled away scolding.

"I never heard of such a thing," he cried in his split, crackling voice. Bambi stood still in astonishment and stared after him.

"It turned out all right this time, but it really was inconsiderate," said a soft, twittering voice close to the ground. It was Jonellina, the pheasant's wife. She was sitting on the ground, hovering over her eggs. "My husband was terribly frightened," she went on in an irritable tone. "And so was I. But I don't dare stir from this spot. I wouldn't stir from this spot no matter what

happened. You could step on me and I wouldn't move.”

Bambi was a little embarrassed. “I beg your pardon,” he stammered, “I didn't mean to do it.”

“O, not at all,” the pheasant's wife replied. “It was nothing so dreadful after all. But my husband and I are so nervous at present. You can understand why....”

Bambi didn't understand why at all and went on. He was quieter now. The forest sang around him. The light grew more radiant and warmer. The leaves on the bushes, the grass underfoot and the moist, steaming earth began to smell more sweetly. Bambi's young strength swelled within him and streamed through all his limbs so that he walked around stiffly with awkward restrained movements like a mechanical thing.

He went up to a low alder shrub and, lifting his feet high, beat on the earth with such savage blows that the dirt flew. His two sharp-pointed hoofs cut the turf that grew there. They scraped away the wood-vetch and leeks, the violets and snowbells, till the bare earth was furrowed in front of him. Every blow sounded dully.

Two moles, who were grubbing among the tangled roots of an old sycamore tree, grew anxious and, looking out, saw Bambi.

“That's a ridiculous way to do things,” said one mole. “Who ever heard of anybody digging that way?”

The other mole drew down one corner of his mouth in a scornful sneer. “He doesn't know anything, you can see that right off,” he said. “But that's the way it is when people meddle with

things they know nothing about.

Suddenly Bambi listened, tossed up his head, listened again, and peered through the leaves. A flash of red showed through the branches. The prongs of an antler gleamed indistinctly. Bambi snorted. Whoever it might be who was circling around him, whether it was Karus or somebody else, didn't matter. "Forward!" thought Bambi as he charged. "I'll show them that I'm not afraid of them," he thought as though suddenly exultant. "I'll show them that they'd better look out for me."

The branches rustled with the fury of his charge, the bushes cracked and broke. Then Bambi saw the other deer right in front of him. He did not recognize him, for everything was swimming before his eyes. He thought of nothing but "Forward!" His antlers lowered, he rushed on. All his strength was concentrated in his shoulders. He was ready for the blow. Then he smelt his opponent's hide. But he saw nothing ahead of him but the red wall of his flank. Then the other stag made a very slight turn and Bambi, not meeting the resistance he expected, charged past him into the empty air. He nearly went head over heels. He staggered, pulled himself together and made ready for a fresh onslaught.

Then he recognized the old stag.

Bambi was so astonished that he lost his self-possession. He was ashamed to run away as he would have liked to do. But he was also ashamed to stay there. He didn't move.

"Well?" asked the old stag, quietly and gently. His voice was so frank and yet so commanding it pierced Bambi to the heart. He was

silent.

“Well?” the old stag repeated.

“I thought...” Bambi stammered, “I thought... it was Ronno... or...” He stopped and risked a shy glance at the old stag. And this glance confused him still more. The old stag stood motionless and powerful. His head had turned completely white by now, and his proud dark eyes glowed in their depths.

“Why don't you charge me...?” the old stag asked.

Bambi looked at him, filled with a wonderful ecstasy, and shaken by a mysterious tremor. He wanted to cry out, “It's because I love you,” but he merely answered, “I don't know...”

The old stag looked at him. “It's a long time since I've seen you,” he said. “You've grown big and strong.”

Bambi did not answer. He trembled with joy. The old stag went on examining him critically. Then he came unexpectedly up to Bambi who was terribly frightened.

“Act bravely,” said the old stag.

He turned around and in the next moment had disappeared. Bambi remained in that place for a long while.

CHAPTER XII

It was summer and sizzling hot. The same longing he had felt before began to stir again in Bambi. But much more strongly now than then. It seethed in his blood and made him restless. He strayed far afield.

One day he met Faline. He met her quite unexpectedly, for his thoughts were so confused, his senses so clouded by the restless desire that raged within him, that he did not even recognize Faline. She was standing in front of him. Bambi stared at her speechless for a while. Then he said as though fascinated, "How beautiful you have grown, Faline!"

"So you recognize me again?" Faline replied.

"How could I help recognizing you?" cried Bambi, "Didn't we grow up together?"

Faline sighed. "It's a long time since we've seen each other," she said. Then she added, "People grow to be strangers," but she was already using her gay bantering tone again. They remained together.

"I used to walk on this path with my mother when I was a child," Bambi said after a while.

"It leads to the meadow," said Faline.

"I saw you for the first time on the meadow," said Bambi a little solemnly. "Do you remember?"

“Yes,” Faline replied, “Gobo and me.” She sighed softly and said, “Poor Gobo....”

Bambi repeated, “Poor Gobo.”

Then they began to talk about old times and asked each other every minute, “Do you remember?” Each saw that the other still remembered everything. And they were both pleased at that.

“Do you remember how we used to play tag on the meadow?” Bambi reminisced.

“Yes, it was like this,” said Faline and she was off like an arrow. At first Bambi hung back, somewhat surprised, and then he rushed after her. “Wait! wait!” he cried joyously.

“I can't wait,” teased Faline, “I'm in too much of a hurry.” And bounding lightly away, she ran in a circle through the grass and bushes. At last Bambi caught up with her and barred the way. Then they stood quietly side by side. They laughed contentedly. Suddenly Faline leaped into the air as though some one had hit her, and bounded off anew. Bambi rushed after her. Faline raced around and around, always managing to elude him.

“Stop!” Bambi panted. “I want to ask you something.”

Faline stopped.

“What do you want to ask me?” she inquired curiously.

Bambi was silent.

“O, so you're only fooling me,” said Faline, and started to turn

away.

“No,” said Bambi quickly. “Stop! stop! I wanted... I wanted to ask you... do you love me, Faline?...”

She looked at him more curiously than before, and a little guardedly. “I don't know,” she said.

“But you must know,” Bambi insisted. “I know very well that I love you. I love you terribly, Faline. Tell me, don't you love me?”

“Maybe I do,” she answered coyly.

“And will you stay with me?” Bambi demanded passionately.

“If you ask me nicely,” Faline said happily.

“Please do, Faline, dear, beautiful, beloved Faline,” cried Bambi, beside himself with love. “Do you hear me? I want you with all my heart.”

“Then I'll certainly stay with you,” said Faline gently, and ran away.

In ecstasy, Bambi darted after her again. Faline fled straight across the meadow, swerved about and vanished into the thicket. But as Bambi swerved to follow her there was a fierce rustling in the bushes and Karus sprang out.

“Halt!” he cried.

Bambi did not hear him. He was too busy with Faline. “Let me pass,” he said hurriedly, “I haven't time for you.”

“Get out,” Karus commanded angrily. “Get away from here this minute or I’ll shake you until there’s no breath left in your body. I forbid you to follow Faline.”

The memory of last summer when he had been so often and so miserably hunted awakened in Bambi. Suddenly he became enraged. He did not say a word, but without waiting any longer rushed at Karus with his antlers lowered.

His charge was irresistible and, before he knew what had happened, Karus was lying in the grass. He was up again quicker than a flash, but was no sooner on his feet than a new attack made him stagger.

“Bambi,” he cried. “Bam...” he tried to cry again, but a third blow, that glanced off his shoulder, nearly choked him with pain.

Karus sprang to one side in order to elude Bambi, who came rushing on again. Suddenly he felt strangely weak. At the same time he realized with a qualm that this was a life and death struggle. Cold terror seized him. He turned to flee from the silent Bambi who came rushing after him. Karus knew that Bambi was furious and would kill him without mercy, and that thought numbed his wits completely. He fled from the path and, with a final effort, burst through the bushes. His one hope was of escape.

All at once Bambi ceased chasing him. Karus did not even notice this in his terror, and kept straight on through the bushes as fast as he could go. Bambi had stopped because he had heard Faline’s shrill call. He listened as she called again in distress and fear. Suddenly he faced about and rushed back.

When he reached the meadow he saw Ronno pursuing Faline who had fled into the thicket.

“Ronno,” cried Bambi. He did not even realize that he had called.

Ronno, who could not run very fast because of his lameness, stood still.

“O, there's our little Bambi,” he said scornfully, “do you want something from me?”

“I do,” said Bambi quietly but in a voice which control and overpowering anger had completely altered. “I want you to let Faline alone and to leave here immediately.”

“Is that all?” sneered Ronno. “What an insolent gamin you're got to be. I wouldn't have thought it possible.”

“Ronno,” said Bambi still more softly, “it's for your own sake. If you don't go now you'll be glad to run later, but then you'll never be able to run again.”

“Is that so?” cried Ronno in a rage. “Do you dare to talk to me like that? It's because I limp, I suppose. Most people don't even notice it. Or maybe you think I'm afraid of you, too, because Karus was such a pitiful coward. I give you fair warning....”

“No, Ronno,” Bambi broke in, “I'll do all the warning. Go!” His voice trembled. “I always liked you, Ronno. I always thought you were very clever and respected you because you were older than I am. I tell you once and for all, go. I haven't any patience left.”

“It's a pity you have so little patience,” Ronno said with a sneer, “a great pity for you, my boy. But be easy, I'll soon finish you off. You won't have long to wait. Maybe you're forgotten how often I used to chase you.”

At the thought of that Bambi had nothing more to say. Nothing could hold him back. Like a wild beast he tore at Ronno who met him with his head lowered. They charged together with a crash. Ronno stood firm but wondered why Bambi did not blench back. The sudden charge had dazed him, for he had not expected that Bambi would attack him first. Uneasily he felt Bambi's giant strength and saw that he must keep himself well in hand.

He tried to turn a trick as they stood forehead pressed against forehead. He suddenly shifted his weight so that Bambi lost his balance and staggered forward.

Bambi braced with his hind legs and hurled himself on Ronno with redoubled fury before he had time to regain his footing. A prong broke from Ronno's antlers with a loud snap. Ronno thought his forehead was shattered. The sparks danced before his eyes and there was a roaring in his ears. The next moment a terrific blow tore open his shoulder. His breath failed him and he fell to the ground with Bambi standing over him furiously.

“Let me go,” Ronno groaned.

Bambi charged blindly at him. His eyes flashed. He seemed to have no thought of mercy.

“Please stop,” whined Ronno pitifully. “Don't you know that I'm lame? I was only joking. Spare me. Can't you take a joke?”

Bambi let him alone without a word. Ronno rose wearily. He was bleeding and his legs tottered. He slunk off in silence.

Bambi started for the thicket to look for Faline, but she came out of her own accord. She had been standing at the edge of the woods and had seen it all.

“That was wonderful,” she said laughingly. Then she added softly and seriously, “I love you.”

They walked on very happily together.

CHAPTER XIII

One day they went to look for the little clearing in the depth of the woods where Bambi had last met the old stag. Bambi told Faline all about the old stag and grew enthusiastic.

“Maybe we'll meet him again,” he said “I'd like you to see him.”

“It would be nice,” said Faline boldly. “I'd really like to chat with him once myself.” But she wasn't telling the truth for, though she was very inquisitive, she was afraid of the old stag.

The twilight was already dusky gray. Sunset was near.

They walked softly side by side where the leaves hung quivering on the shrubs and bushes and permitted a clear view in all directions. Presently there was a rustling sound near by. They stopped and looked towards it. Then the old stag marched slowly and powerfully through the bushes, into the clearing. In the drab twilight he seemed like a gigantic gray shadow.

Faline uttered an involuntary cry. Bambi controlled himself. He was terrified, too, and a cry stuck in his throat. But Faline's voice sounded so helpless that pity seized him and made him want to comfort her.

“What's the matter?” he whispered solicitously, while his voice quavered, “what's the matter with you? He isn't going to hurt us.”

Faline simply shrieked again.

“Don't be so terribly upset, beloved,” Bambi pleaded. “It's ridiculous to be so frightened by him. After all he's one of our own family.”

But Faline wouldn't be comforted. She stood stock-still, staring at the stag who went along unconcerned. Then she shrieked and shrieked.

“Pull yourself together,” Bambi begged. “What will he think of us?”

But Faline was not to be quieted. “He can think what he likes,” she cried bleating again. “Ah-oh! Baoh!... It's terrible to be so big!”

She bleated again, “Baoh! Leave me,” she went on, “I can't help it, I have to bleat. Baoh, baoh, baoh!”

The stag was standing in the little clearing, looking for tidbits in the grass.

Fresh courage came to Bambi who had one eye on the hysterical Faline, the other on the placid stag. With the encouragement he had given Faline he had conquered his own fears. He began to reproach himself for the pitiful state he was in whenever he saw the old stag, a state of mingled terror and excitement, admiration and submissiveness.

“It's perfectly absurd,” he said with painful decision. “I'm going straight over to tell him who I am.”

“Don't,” cried Faline. “Don't! Baoh! Something terrible will happen. Baoh!”

“I’m going anyway,” answered Bambi.

The stag who was feasting so calmly, not paying the slightest attention to the weeping Faline, seemed altogether too haughty to him. He felt offended and humiliated. “I’m going,” he said. “Be quiet. You’ll see, nothing will happen. Wait for me here.”

He went, but Faline did not wait. She hadn’t the least desire or courage to do so. She faced about and ran away crying, for she thought it was the best thing she could do. Bambi could hear her going farther and farther away, bleating, “Baoh! Baoh!”

Bambi would gladly have followed her. But that was no longer possible. He pulled himself together and went forward.

Through the branches he saw the stag standing in the clearing, his head close to the ground. Bambi felt his heart pounding as he stepped out.

The stag immediately lifted his head and looked at him. Then he gazed absently straight ahead again. The way in which the stag gazed into space, as though no one else were there, seemed as haughty to Bambi as the way he had stared at him.

Bambi did not know what to do. He had come with the firm intention of speaking to the stag. He wanted to say, “Good day, I am Bambi. May I ask to know your honorable name also?”

Yes, it had all seemed very easy, but now it appeared that the affair was not so simple. What good were the best of intentions now? Bambi did not want to seem ill-bred, as he would be if he went off without saying a word. But he did not want to seem

forward either, and he would be if he began the conversation.

The stag was wonderfully majestic. It delighted Bambi and made him feel humble. He tried in vain to arouse his courage and kept asking himself, "Why do I let him frighten me? Am I not just as good as he is?" But it was no use. Bambi continued to be frightened and felt in his heart of hearts that he really was not as good as the old stag. Far from it. He felt wretched and had to use all his strength to keep himself steady.

The old stag looked at him and thought, "He's handsome, he's really charming, so delicate, so poised, so elegant in his whole bearing. I must not stare at him, though. It really isn't the thing to do. Besides, it might embarrass him." So he stared over Bambi's head into the empty air again.

"What a haughty look," thought Bambi. "It's unbearable, the opinion such people have of themselves."

The stag was thinking, "I'd like to talk to him, he looks so sympathetic. How stupid never to speak to people we don't know." He looked thoughtfully ahead of him.

"I might as well be air," said Bambi to himself. "This fellow acts as though he were the only thing on the face of the earth."

"What should I say to him?" the old stag was wondering. "I'm not used to talking. I'd say something stupid and make myself ridiculous... for he's undoubtedly very clever."

Bambi pulled himself together and looked fixedly at the stag. "How splendid he is," he thought despairingly.

“Well, some other time, perhaps,” the stag decided and walked off, dissatisfied but majestic.

Bambi remained filled with bitterness.

CHAPTER XIV

The forest sweltered under a scorching sun. Since it rose it had driven even the tiniest cloudlet from the sky, and shone all alone in the wide blue depths that were pallid now with heat. Over the meadows and the tree-tops the air quivered in glassy, transparent ripples as it does over a flame. Not a leaf was moving, not a blade of grass. The birds were silent and sat hidden among the shady leaves, never stirring from their places. All the paths and trails in the thicket were empty. Not a creature was abroad. The forest lay as though hurt by the blinding light. The earth and the trees, the bushes, the beasts, breathed in the intense heat with a kind of sluggish satisfaction.

Bambi was asleep.

He had made merry with Faline all night. He had pranced around with her until broad daylight, and in his bliss had even forgotten to eat. But he had grown so tired that he did not feel hungry any more. His eyes fell shut. He lay down where he happened to be standing in the middle of the bushes, and fell asleep at once.

The bitter acrid odor that streamed from the sun-warmed juniper, and the penetrating scent of spurge laurel, mounted to his head while he slept and gave him new strength. Suddenly he awoke in a daze. Had Faline called him? Bambi looked around. He remembered seeing Faline as he lay down, standing close beside him near the white-thorn, nibbling the leaves. He had supposed she

would remain near him, but she was gone. Apparently she had grown tired of being alone by now and was calling for him to come and look for her.

As Bambi listened he wondered how long he could have slept and how often Faline had called. He wasn't sure. Veils of sleep still clouded his thought.

Then she called again. With a sidewise spring Bambi turned in the direction the sound came from. Then he heard it again. And suddenly he felt perfectly happy. He was wonderfully refreshed, quieted and strengthened, but racked by a terrific appetite.

The call came again clearly, thin as a bird's twittering, tender and full of longing: "Come, come!" it said.

Yes, that was her voice. That was Faline. Bambi rushed away so fast that the dry branches barely crackled as he burst through the bushes and the hot green leaves scarcely rustled.

But he had to stop short in the midst of his course, and swerve to one side, for the old stag was standing there, barring his path.

Bambi had no time for anything but love. The old stag was indifferent to him now. He would meet him again somewhere later on. He had no time for old stags now, however noble they might be. He had thoughts for Faline alone. He greeted the stag hastily and tried to hurry by.

"Where are you going?" asked the old stag earnestly.

Bambi was somewhat embarrassed and tried to think of an evasion, but he changed his mind and answered truthfully, "To

her.”

“Don't go,” said the old stag.

For a second a single angry spark flared up in Bambi's mind. Not go to Faline? How could the mean old stag ask that? “I'll simply run off,” Bambi thought. And he looked quickly at the old stag. But the deep look that met him in the old stag's eyes held him fast. He quivered with impatience but he did not run away.

“She's calling me,” he said in explanation. He said it in a tone which clearly bleated, “Don't keep me talking here.”

“No,” said the old stag, “she isn't calling.”

The call came once again, thin as a bird's twittering, “Come!”

“Listen,” Bambi cried excitedly, “there it is again.”

“I hear it,” said the old stag, nodding.

“Well, good-by,” Bambi flung back hurriedly.

“Stop!” the old stag commanded.

“What do you want?” cried Bambi, beside himself with impatience. “Let me go. I have no time. Please, Faline is calling.... You ought to see that....”

“I tell you,” the old stag said, “that it isn't she.”

Bambi was desperate. “But,” he said, “I know her voice.”

“Listen to me,” the old stag went on.

Again the call came. Bambi felt the ground burning under his feet. "Later," he pleaded, "I'll come right back."

"No," said the old stag sadly, "you'll never come back, never again."

The call came again. "I must go! I must go!" cried Bambi, who was nearly out of his wits.

"Then," the old stag declared in a commanding voice, "we'll go together."

"Quickly," cried Bambi and bounded off.

"No, slowly," commanded the old stag in a voice that forced Bambi to obey. "Stay in back of me. Move one step at a time."

The old stag began to move forward. Bambi followed sighing with impatience.

"Listen," said the old stag without stopping, "no matter how often that call comes, don't stir from my side. If it's Faline, you'll get to her soon enough. But it isn't Faline. Don't let yourself be tempted. Everything depends now on whether you trust me or not."

Bambi did not dare to resist, and surrendered in silence.

The old stag advanced slowly and Bambi followed him. O, how cleverly the old stag moved! Not a sound came from under his hoofs. Not a leaf was disturbed. Not a twig snapped. And yet they were gliding through thick bushes, slinking through the ancient tangled thicket. Bambi was amazed and had to admire him in spite of his impatience. He had never dreamed that anybody could move

like that.

The call came again and again. The old stag stood still, listening and nodding his head. Bambi stood beside him, shaken with desire, and suffering from restraint. He could not understand it at all.

Several times the old stag stopped, although no call had come, and lifted his head, listening and nodding. Bambi heard nothing. The old stag turned away from the direction of the call and made a detour. Bambi raged inwardly because of it.

The call came again and again. At last they drew nearer to it, then still nearer. At last they were quite near.

The old stag whispered, "No matter what you see, don't move, do you hear? Watch everything I do and act just as I do, cautiously. And don't lose your head."

They went a few steps farther and suddenly that sharp, arresting scent that Bambi knew so well struck them full in the face. He swallowed so much of it that he nearly cried out. He stood as though rooted to the ground. For a moment his heart seemed pounding in his throat. The old stag stood calmly beside him and motioned with his eyes.

He was standing there.

He was standing quite close to them leaning against the trunk of an oak, hidden by hazel bushes. He was calling softly, "Come, come!"

Bambi was completely bewildered. He was so terrified that he

began to understand only by degrees that it was He who was imitating Faline's voice. It was He who was calling, "Come, come!"

Cold terror shot through Bambi's body. The idea of flight gripped him and tugged at his heart."

"Be still," whispered the old stag quickly and commandingly as if he meant to forestall any outbreak of fear. Bambi controlled himself with an effort.

The old stag looked at him a little scornfully at first, it seemed to Bambi. He noticed it in spite of the state he was in. But the stag changed at once to a serious and kindly look.

Bambi peered out with blinking eyes to where He was standing, and felt as if he could not bear His horrible presence much longer.

As if he had read this thought, the old stag whispered to him, "Let's go back," and turned about.

They glided away cautiously. The old stag moved with a marvelous zigzag course whose purpose Bambi did not understand. Again he followed with painfully controlled impatience. The longing for Faline had harassed him on the way over; now the impulse to flee was beating through his veins.

But the old stag walked on slowly, stopping and listening. He would begin a new zigzag, then stop again, going very slowly ahead.

By this time they were far from the danger spot. "If he stops again," thought Bambi, "it ought to be all right to speak to him by now, and I'll thank him."

But at that moment the old stag vanished under his very eyes into a thick tangle of dogwood shrubs. Not a leaf stirred, not a twig snapped as the stag slipped away.

Bambi followed and tried to get through as noiselessly, and to avoid every sound with as much skill. But he was not so lucky. The leaves swished gently, the boughs bent against his flanks and sprang up again with a loud twang; dry branches broke against his chest with sharp piercing snaps.

“He saved my life,” Bambi kept thinking. “What can I say to him?”

But the old stag was nowhere to be seen. Bambi came out of the bushes. Around him was a sea of yellow, flowering goldenrod. He raised his head and looked around. Not a leaf was moving as far as he could see. He was all alone.

Freed from all control, the impulse to flee suddenly carried him away. The goldenrods parted with a loud swish beneath his bounding hoofs as though under the stroke of a scythe.

After wandering about for a long time he found Faline. He was breathless, tired and happy and deeply stirred.

“Please, beloved,” he said, “please don't ever call me again. We'll search until we find each other, but please don't ever call me... for I can't resist your voice.”

CHAPTER XV

A few days later they were walking carefree together through an oak thicket on the far side of the meadow. They had to cross the meadow in order to reach their old trail where the tall oak stood.

As the bushes grew thinner around them they stopped and peered out. Something red was moving near the oak. Both of them looked at it.

“Who can it be?” whispered Bambi.

“Probably Ronno or Karus,” said Faline.

Bambi doubted it. “They don't dare come near me any more,” Bambi said, peering sharply ahead. “No,” he decided, “that's not Karus or Ronno. It's a stranger.”

Faline agreed, surprised, and very curious. “Yes,” she said, “it's a stranger. I see it, too, now. How curious!”

They watched him.

“How carelessly he acts,” exclaimed Faline.

“Stupid,” said Bambi, “really stupid. He acts like a little child, as if there were no danger.”

“Let's go over,” Faline proposed. Her curiosity was getting the better of her.

“All right,” Bambi answered. “Let's go, I want to have a better

look at the fellow.”

They took a few steps and then Faline stopped, “Suppose he wants to fight you,” she said. “He's strong.”

“Bah,” said Bambi holding his head cocked and putting on a disdainful air, “look at the little antlers he has. Should I be afraid of that? The fellow is fat and sleek enough, but is he strong? I don't think so. Come along.”

They went on.

The stranger was busy nibbling meadow grass and did not notice them until they were a good way across the meadow. Then he ran forward to meet them. He gave joyful playful skips that made a curiously childish impression. Bambi and Faline stopped, surprised, and waited for him. When he was a few steps off he stood still likewise.

After a while he asked, “Don't you know me?”

Bambi had lowered his head prepared for battle. “Do you know us?” he retorted.

The stranger interrupted him. “Bambi,” he cried reproachfully, yet confidently.

Bambi was startled to hear his name spoken. The sound of that voice stirred an old memory in his heart. But Faline had rushed towards the stranger.

“Gobo,” she cried and became speechless. She stood there silent without moving. She couldn't breathe.

“Faline,” said Gobo softly, “Faline, sister, you knew me anyway.” He went to her and kissed her mouth. The tears were running down his cheeks. Faline was crying too, and couldn't speak.

“Well, Gobo,” Bambi began. His voice trembled and he felt very bewildered. He was deeply moved and very much surprised. “Well, so you're not dead,” he said.

Gobo burst out laughing. “You see that I'm not dead,” he said; “at least I think you can see that I'm not.”

“But what happened that time in the snow?” Bambi persisted.

“O then?” Gobo said thoughtfully. “He rescued me then.”

“And where have you been all this time?” asked Faline in astonishment.

“With Him,” Gobo replied, “I've been with Him all the time.”

He grew silent and looked at Faline and at Bambi. Their helpless astonishment delighted him. Then he added, “Yes, my dears, I've seen a lot more than all of you put together in your old forest.” He sounded somewhat boastful, but they paid no attention to it. They were still too much absorbed in their great surprise.

“Tell us about it,” cried Faline beside herself with joy.

“O,” said Gobo with satisfaction, “I could talk all day about it and never reach the end.”

“Well then, go ahead and talk,” Bambi urged.

Gobo turned to Faline and grew serious. “Is Mother still alive?”

he asked timidly and softly.

“Yes,” cried Faline gladly. “She's alive but I haven't seen her for a long while.”

“I'm going to see her right away,” said Gobo with decision. “Are you coming too?”

They all went.

They did not speak another word the whole way. Bambi and Faline felt Gobo's impatient longing to see his mother, so both of them kept silent. Gobo walked ahead hurriedly and did not speak. They let him do as he liked.

Only sometimes when he hurried blindly over a cross-trail or when, in a sudden burst of speed, he took the wrong turning, they called gently to him, “This way,” Bambi would whisper, or Faline would say, “No, no, we go this way now.”

A number of times they had to cross wide clearings. They noticed that Gobo never stopped at the edge of the thicket, never peered around for a moment when he walked into the open, but simply ran out without any precaution. Bambi and Faline exchanged astonished glances whenever this happened, but they never said a word and followed Gobo with some hesitation. They had to wander around sometime and search high and low.

Gobo recollected his childhood paths at once. He was delighted with himself, never realizing that Bambi and Faline were leading him. He looked around at them and called, “How do you like the way I can still find my way around?” They did not say anything, but

they exchanged glances again.

Soon afterwards they came to a small leafy hollow. "Look," cried Faline and glided in. Gobo followed her and stopped. It was the glade in which they were both born and had lived with their mother as little children. Gobo and Faline looked into each other's eyes. They did not say a word. But Faline kissed her brother gently on the mouth. Then they hurried on.

They walked to and fro for a good hour. The sun shone brighter and brighter through the branches and the forest grew stiller and stiller. It was the time for lying down and resting. But Gobo didn't feel tired. He walked swiftly ahead, breathing deeply with impatience and excitement, and gazed aimlessly about him. He shrank together whenever a weasel slunk through the bushes at his feet. He nearly stepped on the pheasants, and when they scolded him, flying up with a loud flapping of wings, he was terribly frightened. Bambi marveled at the strange, blind way Gobo moved around.

Presently Gobo stopped and turned to them both. "She isn't anywhere here," he cried in despair.

Faline soothed him. "We'll soon find her," she said, deeply moved, "soon, Gobo." She looked at him. He still had that dejected look she knew so well.

"Shall we call her?" she asked smiling. "Shall we call her the way we used to when we were children?"

Bambi went away a few steps. Then he saw Aunt Ena. She had already settled herself to rest and was lying quietly in a nearby

hazel bush.

“At last,” he said to himself. At the same moment Gobo and Faline came up. All three of them stood together and looked at Ena. She had raised her head quietly and looked sleepily back at them.

Gobo took a few hesitating steps and cried softly, “Mother.”

She was on her feet in a flash and stood as though transfixed. Gobo sprang to her quickly. “Mother,” he began again. He tried to speak but couldn't utter a word.

His mother looked deep into his eyes. Her rigid body began to move. Wave after wave of trembling broke over her shoulders and down her back.

She did not ask any questions. She did not want any explanation or history. She kissed Gobo slowly on the mouth. She kissed his cheeks and his neck. She bathed him tirelessly in her kisses, as she had when he was born.

Bambi and Faline had gone away.

CHAPTER XVI

They were all standing around in the middle of the thicket in a little clearing. Gobo was talking to them.

Even Friend Hare was there. Full of astonishment, he would lift one spoonlike ear, listen attentively, and let it fall back, only to lift it again at once.

The magpie was perched on the lowest branch of a young beech and listened in amazement. The jay was sitting restlessly on an ash opposite and screamed every once in a while in wonder.

A few friendly pheasants had brought their wives and children and were stretching their necks in surprise as they listened. At times they would jerk them in again, turning their heads this way and that in speechless wonder.

The squirrel had scurried up and was gesturing, wild with excitement. At times he would slide to the ground, at times he would run up some tree or other. Or he would balance with his tail erect and display his white chest. Every now and again he tried to interrupt Gobo and say something, but he was always told sternly to keep quiet.

Gobo told how he had lain helpless in the snow waiting to die.

“The dogs found me,” he said. “Dogs are terrible. They are certainly the most terrible creatures in the world. Their jaws drip blood and their bark is pitiless and full of anger.” He looked all

around the circle and continued, "Well, since then I've played with them just as I would with one of you." He was very proud. "I don't need to be afraid of them any more, I'm good friends with them now. Nevertheless, when they begin to grow angry, I have a roaring in my ears and my heart stops beating. But they don't really mean any harm by it and, as I said, I'm a good friend of theirs. But their bark is terribly loud."

"Go on," Faline urged.

Gobo looked at her. "Well," he said, "they would have torn me to pieces, but He came."

Gobo paused. The others hardly breathed.

"Yes," said Gobo, "He came. He called off the dogs and they quieted down at once. He called them again and they crouched motionless at His feet. Then He picked me up. I screamed but He petted me. He held me in His arms. He didn't hurt me. And then He carried me away."

Faline interrupted him. "What does 'carry' mean?" she asked.

Gobo began to explain it in great detail.

"It's very simple," Bambi broke in, "look at what the squirrel does when he takes a nut and carries it off."

The squirrel tried to speak again. "A cousin of mine..." he began eagerly. But the others cried out at once, "Be still, be still, let Gobo go on."

The squirrel had to keep quiet. He was desperate and, pressing

his forepaws against his white chest, he tried to begin a conversation with the magpie. "As I was saying, a cousin of mine..." he began. But the magpie simply turned her back on him.

Gobo told of wonders. "Outside it will be cold and the storm is howling. But inside there's not a breath of wind and it's as warm as in summertime," he said.

"Akh!" screamed the jay.

"The rain may be pouring outside so that everything is flooded. But not a drop of it gets inside and you keep dry."

The pheasants craned their necks and twisted their heads.

"Everything outside may be snowed under, but inside I was warm," said Gobo; "I was even hot. They gave me hay to eat and chestnuts, potatoes and turnips, whatever I wanted."

"Hay?" they all cried at once, amazed, incredulous and excited.

"Sweet, new-mown hay," Gobo repeated calmly, and gazed triumphantly around.

The squirrel's voice cut in, "A cousin of mine..."

"Keep quiet," cried the others.

"Where does He get hay and all the rest of the things in winter?" asked Faline eagerly.

"He grows them," Gobo answered, "He grows what He wants and keeps what He wants."

Faline went on questioning him: "Weren't you ever afraid, Gobo, when you were with Him?" she asked.

Gobo smiled a very superior smile. "No, dear Faline," he said, "not any more. I got to know that He wouldn't hurt me. Why should I have been afraid? You all think He's wicked. But He isn't wicked. If He loves anybody or if anybody serves Him, He's good to him. Wonderfully good! Nobody in the world can be as kind as He can."

While Gobo was talking that way the old stag suddenly stepped noiselessly from the bushes.

Gobo didn't notice him and went on talking. But the others saw the old stag and held their breath in awe.

The old stag stood motionless, watching Gobo with deep and serious eyes.

Gobo said, "Not only He, but all His children loved me. His wife and all of them used to pet me and play with me." He broke off suddenly. He had seen the old stag.

A silence followed.

Then the old stag asked in his quiet commanding voice, "What kind of a band is that you have on your neck?"

Everybody looked at it and noticed for the first time the dark strip of braided horsehair around Gobo's neck.

Gobo answered uneasily, "That? Why that's part of the halter I wore. It's His halter and it's the greatest honor to wear His halter, it's...." He grew confused and stammered.

Everyone was silent. The old stag looked at Gobo for a long time, piercingly and sadly.

“You poor thing!” he said softly at last, and turned and was gone.

In the astonished silence that followed, the squirrel began to chatter again. “As I was saying, a cousin of mine stayed with Him, too. He caught him and shut him up, oh, for the longest while, till one day my father....”

But nobody was listening to the squirrel. They were all walking away.

CHAPTER XVII

One day Marena appeared again. She was almost full grown the winter that Gobo disappeared, but she had hardly ever been seen since, for she lived alone, going her own ways.

She had stayed slender and looked quite young. But she was quiet and serious and gentler than any of the others. She had heard from the squirrel and the jay, the magpie and the thrushes and pheasants that Gobo had returned from his wonderful adventures. So she came back to see him.

Gobo's mother was very proud and happy over her visit. Gobo's mother had grown rather proud of her good fortune. She was delighted to hear the whole forest talking about her son. She basked in his glory and wanted everybody to know that her Gobo was the cleverest, ablest and best deer living.

“What do you think of him, Marena?” she exclaimed. “What do you think of our Gobo?” She didn't wait for an answer but went on, “Do you remember how old Nettla said he wasn't worth much because he shivered a little in the cold? Do you remember how she prophesied that he'd be nothing but a care to me?”

“Well,” Marena answered, “you're had plenty of worry over Gobo.”

“That's all over with now,” his mother exclaimed. She wondered how people could still remember such things. “O, I'm sorry for poor old Nettla. What a pity that she couldn't live to see

what my Gobo's become!"

"Yes, poor old Nettla," said Marena softly, "it's too bad about her."

Gobo liked to hear his mother praise him that way. It pleased him. He stood around and basked as happily in her praises as in the sunshine.

"Even the old Prince came to see Gobo," his mother told Marena. She whispered it as though it were something solemn and mysterious. "He never let anyone so much as get a glimpse of him before, but he came on account of Gobo."

"Why did he call me a poor thing?" Gobo broke in in a discontented tone. "I'd like to know what he meant by that."

"Don't think about it," his mother said to comfort him, "he's old and queer."

But at last Gobo meant to ease his mind. "All day long it keeps running through my head," he said. "Poor thing! I'm not a poor thing. I'm very lucky. I've seen more and been through more than all the rest of you put together. I've seen more of the world and I know more about life than anyone in the forest. What do you think, Marena?"

"Yes," she said, "no one can deny that."

From then on Marena and Gobo were always together.

CHAPTER XVIII

Bambi went to look for the old stag. He roamed around all night long. He wandered till the sun rose and dawn found him on unbeaten trails without Faline.

He was still drawn to Faline at times. At times he loved her just as much as ever. Then he liked to roam about with her, to listen to her chatter, to browse with her on the meadow or at the edge of the thicket. But she no longer satisfied him completely.

Before, when he was with Faline, he hardly ever remembered his meetings with the old stag, and when he did it was only casually. Now he was looking for him and felt an inexplicable desire driving him to find him. He only thought of Faline between whiles. He could always be with her if he wanted to. He did not much care to stay with the others. Gobo or Aunt Ena he avoided when he could.

The words the old stag had let fall about Gobo kept ringing in Bambi's ears. They made a peculiarly deep impression on him. Gobo had affected him strangely from the very first day of his return. Bambi didn't know why, but there was something painful to him in Gobo's bearing. Bambi was ashamed of Gobo without knowing why. And he was afraid for him, again without knowing why. Whenever he was together with this harmless, vain, self-conscious and self-satisfied Gobo, the words kept running through his head, "Poor thing!" He couldn't get rid of them.

But one dark night when Bambi had again delighted the screech-owl by assuring him how badly he was frightened, it suddenly occurred to him to ask, "Do you happen to know where the old stag is now?"

The screech-owl answered in his cooing voice that he didn't have the least idea in the world. But Bambi perceived that he simply didn't want to tell.

"No," he said, "I don't believe you, you're too clever. You know everything that's happening in the forest. You certainly must know where the old stag is hiding."

The screech-owl, who was all fluffed up, smoothed his feathers against his body and made himself small. "Of course I know," he cooed still more softly, "but I oughtn't to tell you, I really oughtn't."

Bambi began to plead. "I won't give you away," he said. "How could I, when I respect you so much?"

The owl became a lovely, soft gray-brown ball again and rolled his big cunning eyes a little as he always did when he felt in a good humor. "So you really do respect me," he asked, "and why, pray?"

Bambi did not hesitate. "Because you're so wise," he said sincerely, "and so good-natured and friendly, besides. And because you're so clever at frightening people. It's so very clever to frighten people, so very, very clever. I wish I could do it, it would be a great help to me."

The screech-owl had sunk his bill into his downy breast and was happy.

“Well,” he said, “I know that the old stag would be glad to see you.”

“Do you really think so?” cried Bambi while his heart began to beat faster for joy.

“Yes, I'm sure of it,” the owl answered. “He'd be glad to see you, and I think I can venture to tell you where he is now.”

He laid his feathers close to his body and suddenly grew thin again.

“Do you know the deep ditch where the willows stand?”

Bambi nodded yes.

“Do you know the young oak thicket on the farther side?”

“No,” Bambi confessed, “I've never been on the farther side.”

“Well, listen carefully then,” the owl whispered. “There's an oak thicket on the far side. Go through that. Then there are bushes, hazel and silver poplar, thorn and shadbush. In the midst of them is an old uprooted beech. You'll have to hunt for it. It's not so easy to see it from your height as it is from the air. You'll find him under the trunk. But don't tell him I told you.”

“Under the trunk?” said Bambi.

“Yes,” the screech-owl laughed, “there's a hollow in the ground there. The trunk lies right across it. And he sleeps under the trunk.”

“Thank you,” said Bambi sincerely. “I don't know if I can find it, but I'm very grateful anyhow.” He ran quickly away.

The screech-owl flew noiselessly after him and began to hoot right beside him. "Oi, oi!" Bambi shrank together.

"Did I frighten you?" asked the owl.

"Yes," he stammered, and that time he told the truth.

The owl cooed with satisfaction and said, "I only wanted to remind you again. Don't tell him I told you."

"Of course not," Bambi assured him and ran on.

When Bambi reached the ditch the old stag rose before him out of the pitch-black night so noiselessly and suddenly that Bambi drew back in terror.

"I'm no longer where you were going to look for me," said the stag.

Bambi was silent.

"What is it you want?" asked the stag.

"Nothing," Bambi stammered, "nothing, excuse me, nothing at all."

After a while the old stag spoke, and his voice sounded gentle. "This isn't the first time you're been looking for me," he said.

He waited. Bambi did not answer. The old stag went on, "Yesterday you passed close by me twice, and again this morning, very close."

"Why," said Bambi gathering courage, "why did you say that

about Gobo?"

"Do you think that I was wrong?"

"No," cried Bambi sorrowfully, "no, I feel that you were right."

The old stag gave a barely perceptible nod and his eyes rested on Bambi more kindly than ever before.

"But why?" Bambi said, "I don't understand it."

"It's enough that you feel it. You will understand it later," the old stag said. "Good-by."

CHAPTER XIX

Everybody soon saw that Gobo had habits which seemed strange and suspicious to the rest of them. He slept at night when the others were awake. But in the daytime, when the rest of them were looking for places to sleep in, he was wide awake and went walking. When he felt like it he would even go out of the thicket without any hesitation and stand with perfect peace of mind in the bright sunshine on the meadow.

Bambi found it impossible to keep silent any longer. "Don't you ever think of the danger?" he asked.

"No," Gobo said simply, "there isn't any for me."

"You forget, my dear Bambi," Gobo's mother broke in, "you forget that He's a friend of Gobo's. Gobo can take chances that the rest of you cannot take." She was very proud.

Bambi did not say anything more.

One day Gobo said to him, "You know, it seems strange to me to eat when and where I like."

Bambi did not understand. "Why is it strange, we all do it," he said.

"O, you do," said Gobo superiorly, "but I'm a little different. I'm accustomed to having my food brought to me or to being called when it's ready."

Bambi stared pityingly at Gobo. He looked at Faline and Marena and Aunt Ena. But they were all smiling and admiring Gobo.

"I think it will be hard for you to get accustomed to the winter, Gobo," Faline began, "we don't have hay or turnips or potatoes in the winter time."

"That's true," answered Gobo reflectively, "I hadn't thought about that yet. I can't even imagine how it would feel. It must be dreadful."

Bambi said quietly, "It isn't dreadful. It's only hard."

"Well," Gobo declared grandly, "if it gets too hard for me I'll simply go back to Him. Why should I go hungry? There's no need for that."

Bambi turned away without a word and walked off.

When Gobo was alone again with Marena he began to talk about Bambi. "He doesn't understand me," he said. "Poor old Bambi thinks I'm still the silly little Gobo that I once was. He can never get used to the fact that I've become something unusual. Danger!... What does he mean by danger? He means well enough by me, but danger is something for him and the likes of him, not for me."

Marena agreed with him. She loved him and Gobo loved her and they were both very happy.

"Well," he said to her, "nobody understands me the way you do. But anyhow I can't complain. I'm respected and honored by everybody. But you understand me best of all. When I tell the

others how good He is, they listen and they don't think I'm lying, but they stick to their opinion that He's dreadful.”

“I've always believed in Him,” said Marena dreamily.

“Really?” Gobo replied airily.

“Do you remember the day when they left you lying in the snow?” Marena went on. “I said that day that sometime He'd come to the forest to play with us.”

“No,” Gobo replied yawning, “I don't remember that.”

A few weeks passed, and one morning Bambi and Faline, Gobo and Marena were standing together again in the old familiar hazel thicket. Bambi and Faline were just returning from their wanderings, intending to look for their hiding place when they met Gobo and Marena. Gobo was about to go out on the meadow.

“Stay with us instead,” said Bambi, “the sun will soon be rising and then nobody will go out in the open.”

“Nonsense,” said Gobo, scornfully, “if nobody else will go, I will.”

He went on, Marena following him.

Bambi and Faline had stopped. “Come along,” said Bambi angrily to Faline, “come along. Let him do what he pleases.”

They were going on, but suddenly the jay screamed loudly from the far side of the meadow. With a bound Bambi had turned and was running after Gobo. Right by the oak he caught up with

him and Marena.

“Did you hear that?” he cried to him.

“What?” asked Gobo puzzled.

Again the jay screamed on the far side of the meadow.

“Did you hear that?” Bambi repeated.

“No,” said Gobo calmly.

“That means danger,” Bambi persisted.

A magpie began to chatter loudly and, immediately after her, another and then a third. Then the jay screamed again and far overhead the crows gave warning.

Faline began to plead. “Don't go out there, Gobo! It's dangerous.”

Even Marena begged, “Stay here. Stay here to-day, beloved one. It's dangerous.”

Gobo stood there, smiling in his superior way. “Dangerous! dangerous! What has that to do with me?” he asked.

His pressing need gave Bambi an idea. “At least let Marena go first,” he said, “so we can find out...”

He hadn't finished before Marena had slipped out.

All three stood and looked at her, Bambi and Faline breathlessly, Gobo with obvious patience, as if to let the others

enjoy their foolish whims.

They saw how Marena walked across the meadow step by step, with hesitant feet, her head up. She peered and snuffed in all directions. Suddenly she turned like a flash with one high bound and, as though a cyclone had struck her, rushed back into the thicket.

"It's He, He," she whispered, her voice choking with terror. She was trembling in every limb. "I, I saw Him," she stammered, "it's He. He's standing over by the alders."

"Come," cried Bambi, "come quickly."

"Come," Faline pleaded. And Marena who could hardly speak, whispered, "Please come now, Gobo, please."

But Gobo remained unmoved. "Run as much as you like," he said, "I won't stop you. If He's there I want to talk with Him."

Gobo could not be dissuaded.

They stood and watched how he went out. They stayed there, moved by his great confidence, while at the same time a terrible fear for him gripped them.

Gobo was standing boldly on the meadow looking around for the alders. Then he seemed to see them and to have discovered Him. Then the thunder crashed.

Gobo leaped into the air at the report. He suddenly turned around and fled back to the thicket, staggering as he came.

They still stood there, petrified with terror, while he came on. They heard him gasping for breath. And as he did not stop but bounded wildly forward, they turned and surrounded him and all took flight.

But poor Gobo dropped to the ground. Marena stopped close to him, Bambi and Faline a little farther off, ready to flee.

Gobo lay with his bloody entrails oozing from his torn flank. He lifted his head with a feeble twisting motion.

“Marena,” he said with an effort, “Marena....” He did not recognize her. His voice failed.

There was a loud careless rustling in the bushes by the meadow. Marena bent her head towards Gobo. “He's coming,” she whispered frantically, “Gobo, He's coming! Can't you get up and come with me?”

Gobo lifted his head again feebly with a writhing motion, beat convulsively with his hoofs and then lay still.

With a crackling, snapping and rustling He parted the bushes and stepped out.

Marena saw Him from quite near. She slunk slowly back, disappearing through the nearest bushes, and hastened to Bambi and Faline.

She looked back once again and saw how He was bending over and seizing the wounded deer.

Then they heard Gobo's wailing death shriek.

CHAPTER XX

Bambi was alone. He walked beside the water that ran swiftly among the reeds and swamp-willows.

He went there more and more often now that he was staying by himself. There were few trails there, and he hardly ever met any of his friends. That was just what he wanted. For his thoughts had grown serious and his heart heavy. He did not know what was happening within him. He did not even think about it. He merely recalled things aimlessly, and his whole life seemed to have become darker.

He used to stand for hours on the bank. The current, that flowed round a gentle bend there, occupied his entire thought. The cool air from the ripples brought him strange, refreshing, acrid smells that aroused forgetfulness and a sense of trust in him.

Bambi would stand and watch the ducks paddling companionably together. They talked endlessly to one another in a friendly, serious, capable way.

There were a couple of mother ducks, each with a flock of young ones around her. They were constantly teaching their young ones things. And the little ones were always learning them. Sometimes one or the other of the mothers would give a warning. Then the young ducks would dash off in all directions. They would scatter and glide away perfectly noiselessly. Bambi saw how the smallest ones, who could not fly yet, would paddle among the thick

rushes without moving a stem that might betray them by swaying. He would see the small dark bodies creep here and there among the reeds. Then he could see nothing more.

Later one of the mothers would give a short call and in a flash they would all flock around her again. In an instant they would reassemble their flotilla and go on cruising quietly about as before. Bambi marveled anew at it each time. It was a constant source of wonder to him.

After one such alarm, Bambi asked one of the mothers, "What was it? I was looking closely and I didn't see anything."

"It was nothing at all," answered the duck.

Another time one of the children gave the signal, turning like a flash and staring through the reeds. Presently he came out on the bank where Bambi was standing.

"There wasn't anything," the young one replied, shaking its tail feathers in a grown-up way and carefully putting the tips of its wings in place. Then it paddled through the water again.

Nevertheless Bambi had faith in the ducks. He came to the conclusion that they were more watchful than he, that they heard and saw things more quickly. When he stood watching them, that ceaseless tension that he felt within himself at other times relaxed a little.

He liked to talk with the ducks, too. They didn't talk the nonsense that he so often heard from the others. They talked about the broad skies and the wind and about distant fields where they

feasted on choice tidbits.

From time to time Bambi saw something that looked like a fiery streak in the air beside the brook. “Srrrri!” the hummingbird would cry softly, darting past like a tiny whirring speck. There was a gleam of green, a glow of red, as he flashed by and was gone. Bambi was thrilled and wanted to see the bright stranger near to. He called to him.

“Don't bother calling him,” the sedge-hen said to Bambi from among the reed clumps, “don't bother calling. He'll never answer you.”

“Where are you?” asked Bambi peering among the reeds.

But the sedge-hen only laughed loudly from an entirely different place, “Here I am. That cranky creature you just called to won't talk to anyone. It's useless to call him.”

“He's so handsome,” said Bambi.

“But bad,” the sedge-hen retorted from still another place.

“What makes you think him bad?” Bambi inquired.

The sedge-hen answered from an altogether different place, “He doesn't care for anything or anybody. Let anything happen that wants to, he won't speak to anybody and never thanked anybody for speaking to him. He never gives anybody warning when there's danger. He's never said a word to a living soul.”

“The poor...” said Bambi.

The sedge-hen went on talking, and her cheery, piping voice sounded from the far side again. "He probably thinks that people are jealous of his silly markings and doesn't want them to get too good a look at him."

"Certain other people don't let you get a good look at them either," said Bambi.

In a twinkling the sedge-hen was standing in front of him. "There's nothing to look at in my case," she said simply. Small and gleaming with water, she stood there in her sleek feathers, her trim figure restless, animated and satisfied. In a flash she was gone again.

"I don't understand how people can stand so long in one spot," she called from the water. And added from the far side, "It's tiresome and dangerous to stay so long in one spot." Then from the other side she cried gaily once or twice. "You have to keep moving," she cried happily, "you're got to keep moving if you want to keep whole and hearty."

A soft rustling in the grass startled Bambi. He looked around. There was a reddish flash among the bushes. It disappeared in the reeds. At the same time a sharp warm smell reached his nostrils. The fox had slunk by.

Bambi wanted to cry out and stamp on the ground as a warning. But the sedges rustled as the fox parted them in quick leaps. The water splashed and a duck screamed desperately. Bambi heard her wings flapping and saw her white body flash through the leaves. He saw how her wings beat the fox's face with sharp blows.

Then it grew still.

At the same moment the fox came out of the bushes holding the duck in his jaws. Her neck hung down limply, her wings were still moving, but the fox paid no attention to that. He looked sidewise at Bambi with sneering eyes and crept slowly into the thicket.

Bambi stood motionless.

A few of the old ducks had flown up with a rush of wings and were flying around in helpless fright. The sedge-hen was crying warnings from all directions. The titmice chirped excitedly in the bushes. And the young orphaned ducks splashed about the sedge, crying with soft voices.

The hummingbird flew along the bank.

“Please tell us,” the young ducks cried, “please, tell us, have you seen our mother?”

“Srrri,” cried the hummingbird shrilly, and flew past sparkling, “what has she got to do with me?”

Bambi turned and went away. He wandered through a whole sea of goldenrod, passed through a grove of young beeches, crossed through old hazel thickets until he reached the edge of the deep ditch. He roamed around it, hoping to meet the old stag. He had not seen him for a long while, not since Gobo's death.

Then he caught a glimpse of him from afar and ran to meet him. For a while they walked together in silence, then the old stag asked: “Well, do they still talk about him the way they used to?”

Bambi understood that he referred to Gobo and replied, "I don't know. I'm nearly alone now." He hesitated, "But I think of him very often."

"Really," said the old stag, "are you alone now?"

"Yes," said Bambi expectantly, but the old stag remained silent.

They went on. Suddenly the old stag stopped. "Don't you hear anything?" he asked.

Bambi listened. He didn't hear anything.

"Come," cried the old stag and hurried forward. Bambi followed him. The stag stopped again. "Don't you hear anything yet?" he asked.

Then Bambi heard a rustling that he did not understand. It sounded like branches being bent down and repeatedly springing up again. Something was beating the earth dully and irregularly.

Bambi wanted to flee but the old stag cried, "Come with me," and ran in the direction of the noise. Bambi at his side ventured to ask, "Isn't it dangerous?"

"It's terribly dangerous," the old stag answered mysteriously.

Soon they saw branches being pulled and tugged at from below and shaken violently. They went nearer and saw that a little trail ran through the middle of the bushes.

Friend Hare was lying on the ground. He flung himself from side to side and writhed. Then he lay still and writhed again. Each

of his motions pulled at the branches over him.

Bambi noticed a dark threadlike leash. It ran right from the branch to Friend Hare and was twisted around his neck.

Friend Hare must have heard someone coming, for he flung himself wildly into the air and fell to the ground. He tried to escape and rolled, jerking and writhing in the grass.

“Lie still,” the old stag commanded. Then sympathetically, with a gentle voice that went to Bambi's heart, he repeated in his ear, “Be easy, Friend Hare, it's I. Don't move now. Lie perfectly still.”

The Hare lay motionless, flat on the ground. His throttled breath rattled softly in his throat.

The old stag took the branch between his teeth, and twisted it. He bent it down. Then he walked around putting his weight cunningly against it. He held it to the earth with his hoof and snapped it with a single blow of his antlers.

Then he nodded encouragingly to the Hare. “Lie still,” he said, “even if I hurt you.”

Holding his head on one side, he laid one prong of his antlers close to the Hare's neck and pressed into the fur behind his ear. He made an effort and nodded. The Hare began to writhe.

The old stag immediately drew back. “Lie still,” he commanded, “it's a question of life and death for you.” He began over again. The Hare lay still gasping. Bambi stood close by, speechless with amazement.

One of the old stag's antlers, pressing against the Hare's fur, had slipped under the noose. The old stag was almost kneeling and twisted his head as though he were charging. He drove his antlers deeper and deeper under the noose, which gave at last and began to loosen.

The Hare could breathe again and his terror and pain burst from him instantly. "E-e-eh!" he cried bitterly.

The old stag stopped. "Keep quiet!" he cried, reproaching him gently, "keep quiet." His mouth was close to the Hare's shoulder, his antlers lay with a prong between the spoonlike ears. It looked as if he had spitted the Hare.

"How can you be so stupid as to cry at this time?" he grumbled gently. "Do you want the fox to come? Do you? I thought not. Keep quiet then."

He continued to work away, slowly exerting all his strength. Suddenly the noose broke with a loud snap. The Hare slipped out and was free, without realizing it for a moment. He took a step and sat down again dazed. Then he hopped away, slowly and timidly at first, then faster and faster. Presently he was running with wild leaps.

Bambi looked after him. "Without so much as a thank you," he exclaimed in surprise.

"He's still terrified," said the old stag.

The noose lay on the ground. Bambi touched it gently. It creaked, terrifying Bambi. That was a sound such as he had never

heard in the woods.

“He?” asked Bambi softly.

The old stag nodded.

They walked on together in silence. “Take care when you're going along a trail,” said the old stag, “test all the branches. Prod them on all sides of you with your antlers. And turn back at once if you hear that creak. And when you're shed your antlers be doubly cautious. I never use trails any more.”

Bambi sank into troubled thought.

“He isn't here,” he whispered to himself in profound astonishment.

“No, He's not in the forest now,” the old stag answered.

“And yet He is here,” said Bambi, shaking his head.

The old stag went on and his voice was full of bitterness. “How did your Gobo put it...? Didn't Gobo tell you He is all-powerful and all-good?”

“He was good to Gobo,” Bambi whispered.

The old stag stopped. “Do you believe that, Bambi?” he asked sadly. For the first time he had called Bambi by his name.

“I don't know,” cried Bambi hurt, “I don't understand it.”

The old stag said slowly, “We must learn to live and be cautious.”

CHAPTER XXI

One morning Bambi came to grief.

The pale gray dawn was just creeping through the forest. A milky-white mist was rising from the meadow and the stillness that precedes the coming of light was everywhere. The crows were not awake yet, nor the magpies. The jays were asleep.

Bambi had met Faline the night before. She looked sadly at him and was very shy.

"I'm so much alone now," she said gently.

"I'm alone too," Bambi answered with some hesitation.

"Why don't you stay with me any more?" Faline asked sorrowfully, and it hurt him to see the gay and lively Faline so serious and downcast.

"I want to be alone," he replied. And gently as he tried to say it, it sounded hard. He felt it himself.

Faline looked at him and asked softly, "Do you love me still?"

"I don't know," Bambi answered in the same tone.

She walked silently away from him, leaving him alone.

He stood under the great oak at the meadow's edge and peered out cautiously, drinking in the pure and odorless morning air. It was moist and fresh from the earth, the dew, the grass and the wet

woods. Bambi breathed in great gulps of it. All at once his spirit felt freer than for a long time. He walked happily onto the mist-covered meadow.

Then a sound like thunder crashed.

Bambi felt a fearful blow that made him stagger.

Mad with terror, he sprang back into the thicket and kept running. He did not understand what had happened. He could not grasp a single idea. He could only keep running on and on. Fear gripped his heart so that his breath failed as he rushed blindly on. Then a killing pain shot through him, so that he felt that he could not bear it. He felt something hot running over his left shoulder. It was like a thin, burning thread coming from where the pain shot through him. Bambi had to stop running. He was forced to walk slower. Then he saw that he was limping. He sank down.

It was comfortable just to lie there and rest.

“Up, Bambi! Get up!” the old stag was standing beside him, and nudging his shoulder gently.

Bambi wanted to answer, “I can’t,” but the old stag repeated, “Up! Up!” And there was such compulsion in his voice and such tenderness that Bambi kept silent. Even the pain that shot through him stopped for a minute.

Then the old stag said hurriedly and anxiously, “Get up! You must get away, my son!” My son! The words seemed to have escaped him. In a flash Bambi was on his feet.

“Good,” said the old stag, breathing deeply and speaking

emphatically, “come with me now and keep close beside me.”

He walked swiftly ahead. Bambi followed him but he felt a burning desire to let himself drop to the ground, to lie still and rest.

The old stag seemed to guess it and talked to him without stopping. “Now you'll have to bear every pain. You can't think of lying down now. You mustn't think of it even for a moment. That's enough to tire you in itself. You must save yourself, do you understand me, Bambi? Save yourself. Or else you are lost. Just remember that He is behind you, do you understand, Bambi? And He will kill you without mercy. Come on. Keep close to me. You'll soon be all right. You must be all right.”

Bambi had no strength left to think with. The pain shot through him at every step he took. It took away his breath and his consciousness. The hot trickle, burning his shoulder, seared him like some deep heartfelt trouble.

The old stag made a wide circle. It took a long time. Through his veil of pain and weakness, Bambi was amazed to see that they were passing the great oak again.

The old stag stopped and snuffed the ground. “He's still here,” he whispered. “It's He. And that's His dog. Come along. Faster!” They ran.

Suddenly the old stag stopped again. “Look,” he said, “that's where you lay on the ground.”

Bambi saw the crushed grasses where a wide pool of his own blood was soaking into the earth.

The old stag snuffed warily around the spot. "They were here, He and His dog," he said. "Come along!" He went ahead slowly, snuffing again and again.

Bambi saw the red drops gleaming on the leaves of the bushes and the grass stems. "We passed here before," he thought. But he couldn't speak.

"Aha!" said the old stag and seemed almost joyful, "we're behind them now."

He continued for a while on the same path. Then he doubled unexpectedly and began a new circle. Bambi staggered after him. They came to the oak again but on the opposite side. For the second time they passed the place where Bambi had fallen down. Then the old stag went in still another direction.

"Eat that," he commanded suddenly, stopping and pushing aside the grasses. He pointed to a pair of short dark-green leaves growing close together near the ground.

Bambi obeyed. They tasted terribly bitter and smelt sickeningly.

"How do you feel now?" the stag asked after a while.

"Better," Bambi answered quickly. He was suddenly able to speak again. His senses had cleared and his fatigue grew less.

"Let's move on again," the old stag commanded after another pause. After Bambi had been following him for a long time he said, "At last!" They stopped.

“The bleeding has stopped,” said the old stag, “the blood's stopped flowing from your wound. It isn't emptying your veins now. And it can't betray you any more either. It can't show Him and His dog where to find you and kill you.”

The old stag looked worried and tired but his voice sounded joyful. “Come along,” he went on, “now you can rest.”

They reached a wide ditch which Bambi had never crossed. The old stag climbed down and Bambi tried to follow him. But it cost him a great effort to climb the steep slope on the farther side. The pain began to shoot violently through him again. He stumbled, regained his feet, and stumbled again, breathing hard.

“I can't help you,” said the old stag, “you'll have to get up yourself.” Bambi reached the top. He felt the hot trickle on his shoulder again. He felt his strength ebbing for the second time.

“You're bleeding again,” said the old stag, “I thought you would. But it's only a little,” he added in a whisper, “and it doesn't make any difference now.”

They walked very slowly through a grove of lofty beeches. The ground was soft and level. They walked easily on it. Bambi felt a longing to lie down there, to stretch out and never move his limbs again. He couldn't go any further. His head ached. There was a humming in his ears. His nerves were quivering, and fever began to rack him. There was a darkness before his eyes. He felt nothing but a desire for rest and a detached amazement at finding his life so changed and shattered. He remembered how he had walked whole and uninjured through the woods that morning. It was barely an

hour ago, and it seemed to him like some memory out of a distant, long-vanished past.

They passed through a scrub-oak and dogwood thicket. A huge, hollow beech trunk, thickly entangled with the bushes, lay right in front of them, barring the way.

“Here we are,” Bambi heard the old stag saying. He walked along the beech trunk and Bambi walked beside him. He nearly fell into a hollow that lay in front of him.

“Here it is,” said the old stag at the moment, “you can lie down here.”

Bambi sank down and did not move again.

The hollow was still deeper under the beech trunk and formed a little chamber. The bushes closed thickly across the top so that whoever was within lay hidden.

“You'll be safe here,” said the old stag.

Days passed.

Bambi lay on the warm earth with the moldering bark of the fallen tree above him. He felt his pain intensify and then grow less and less until it died away more and more gently.

Sometimes he would creep out and stand swaying weakly on his unsteady legs. He would take a few steps to look for food. He ate plants now that he had never noticed before. Now they appealed to his taste and attracted him by their strange, enticing acrid smell. Everything that he had disdained before and would spit

out if it got accidentally into his mouth seemed appetizing to him. He still disliked many of the little leaves and short, coarse shoots, but he ate them anyway, as though he were compelled to, and his wound healed faster. He felt his strength returning.

He was cured, but he didn't leave the hollow yet. He walked around a little at night, but lay quietly on his bed by day. Not until the fever had entirely left his body did Bambi begin to think over all that had happened to him. Then a great terror awoke in him, and a profound tremor passed through his heart. He could not shake himself free of it. He could not get up and run about as before. He lay still and troubled. He felt terrified, ashamed, amazed and troubled by turns. Sometimes he was full of despair, at others of joy.

The old stag was always with him. At first he stayed day and night at Bambi's side. Then he left him alone at times, especially when he saw Bambi deep in thought. But he always kept close at hand.

One night there was thunder and lightning and a downpour of rain, although the sky was clear and the setting sun was streaming down. The blackbirds sang loudly in all the neighboring tree-tops, the finches warbled, the titmice chirped in the bushes. Among the grasses or from under the bushes, the metallic, throaty cackling of the pheasants sounded at intervals. The woodpecker laughed exultantly and the doves cooed their fervid love.

Bambi crept out of the hollow. Life was beautiful. The old stag was standing there as though he expected Bambi. They sauntered on together.

CHAPTER XXII

One night when the air was whispering with the autumnal fall of leaves the screech-owl shrieked piercingly among the branches. Then he waited.

But Bambi had spied him already through the thinning leaves, and stopped.

The screech-owl flew nearer and shrieked louder. Then he waited again. But Bambi did not say anything.

Then the owl could restrain himself no longer. "Aren't you frightened?" he asked, displeased.

"Well," Bambi replied, "a little."

"Is that so?" the screech-owl cooed in an offended tone. "Only a little. You used to get terribly frightened. It was really a pleasure to see how frightened you'd get. But for some reason or other you're only a little frightened now." He grew angrier and repeated, "Only a little!"

The screech-owl was getting old, and that was why he was so much vainer and so much more sensitive than before.

Bambi wanted to answer, "I wasn't ever frightened before either," but he decided to keep that to himself. He was sorry to see the good old screech-owl sitting there so angry. He tried to soothe him. "Maybe it's because I thought of you right away," he said.

“What?” said the screech-owl, becoming happy again, “you really did think of me?”

“Yes,” Bambi answered with some hesitation, “as soon as I heard you screech. Otherwise, of course, I’d have been as scared as ever.”

“Really?” cooed the owl.

Bambi hadn't the heart to deny it. What difference did it make anyhow? Let the little old child enjoy himself.

“I really did,” he assured him, and went on, “I’m so happy, for a thrill goes through me when I hear you so suddenly.”

The screech-owl fluffed up his feathers into a soft, brownish-gray, downy ball. He was happy. “It’s nice of you to think of me,” he cooed tenderly, “very nice. We haven’t seen each other for a long time.”

“A very long time,” said Bambi.

“You don’t use the old trails any more, do you?” the screech-owl inquired.

“No,” said Bambi slowly, “I don’t use the old trails any more.”

“I’m also seeing more of the world than I used to,” the screech-owl observed boastfully. He didn’t mention that he had been driven from his old hereditary haunts by a pitiless younger rival. You can’t stay forever in the same spot,” he added. Then he waited for an answer.

But Bambi had gone away. By now he understood almost as well as the old stag how to disappear suddenly and noiselessly.

The screech-owl was provoked. "It's a shame...." he cooed to himself. He shook his feathers, sank his bill deep into his breast and silently philosophized, "You should never imagine you can be friends with great folks. They can be as nice as pie but when the time comes they haven't a thought for you, and you're left sitting stupidly by yourself as I'm sitting here now...."

Suddenly he dropped to the earth like a stone. He had spied a mouse. It squeaked once in his talons. He tore it to pieces, for he was furious. He crammed the little morsel faster than usual. Then he flew off. "What do all your great folks mean to me?" he asked. "Not a thing." He began to screech so piercingly and ceaselessly that a pair of wood-doves whom he passed awoke and fled from their roost with loud wing beats.

The storm swept the woods for several days and tore the last leaves from the branches. Then the trees stood stripped.

Bambi was wandering homewards in the gray dawn in order to sleep in the hollow with the old stag.

A shrill voice called him once or twice in quick succession. He stopped. Then the squirrel scampered down from the branches in a twinkling and sat on the ground in front of him.

"Is it really you?" he shrilled, surprised and delighted. "I recognized you the minute you passed me but I couldn't believe...."

“Where did you come from?” asked Bambi.

The merry little face in front of him grew quite troubled. “The oak is gone,” he began plaintively, “my beautiful old oak, do you remember it? It was awful. He chopped it down!”

Bambi hung his head sadly. His very soul felt sorry for the wonderful old tree.

“As soon as it happened,” the squirrel related, “everybody who lived in the tree fled and watched how He bit through the trunk with a gigantic flashing tooth. The tree groaned aloud when it was wounded. It kept on groaning and the tooth kept gnawing, it was dreadful to hear it. Then the poor beautiful tree fell out on the meadow. Everybody cried.”

Bambi was silent.

“Yes,” sighed the squirrel, “He can do anything. He's all-powerful.” He gazed at Bambi out of his big eyes, and pointed his ears. But Bambi kept silent.

“Then we were all homeless,” the squirrel went on, “I don't even know where the others scattered to. I came here. But I won't find another tree like that in a hurry.”

“The old oak,” said Bambi to himself, “I knew it from the time I was a child.”

“O well,” said the squirrel. “But to think it's really you,” he went on delightedly. “Everybody said you must be dead long ago. Of course there were some people now and then who said you were still alive. Once in a while someone said he had seen you. But

nobody could find out anything definite. And so I thought it was only gossip,” the squirrel gazed at him inquisitively, “since you didn't come back any more.”

Bambi could see how curious he was and how he was fishing for an answer.

Bambi kept silent. But a gentle anxious curiosity was stirring in him, too. He wanted to ask about Faline, about Aunt Ena, and Ronno and Karus, about all his childhood companions. But he kept silent.

The squirrel still sat in front of him, studying him. “What antlers!” he cried admiringly. “What antlers! Nobody in the whole forest, except the old Prince, has antlers like that.”

Once Bambi would have felt elated and flattered by such praise. But he only said, “Maybe.”

The squirrel nodded quickly with his head. “Really,” he said, surprised, “you're beginning to get gray.”

Bambi wandered on.

The squirrel perceived that the conversation was over and sprang through the bushes. “Good day,” he shouted down. “Good-bye. I'm very glad I met you. If I see any of your acquaintances I'll tell them you're still alive. They'll all be glad.”

Bambi heard him and again felt that gentle stirring in his heart. But he said nothing. When he was still a child the old stag had taught him that you must live alone. Then and afterward the old stag had revealed much wisdom and many secrets to him. But of all

his teachings this had been the most important; you must live alone, if you wanted to preserve yourself, if you understood existence, if you wanted to attain wisdom, you had to live alone.

“But,” Bambi had once objected, “we two are always together now.”

“Not for very much longer,” the old stag had answered quickly. That was a few weeks ago. Now it occurred to Bambi again, and he suddenly remembered how even the old stag's very first words to him had been about singleness. That day when Bambi was still a child calling for his mother, the old stag had come to him and asked him, “Can't you stay by yourself?”

Bambi wandered on.

CHAPTER XXIII

The forest was again under snow, lying silent beneath its deep white mantle. Only the crows' calls could be heard. Now and then came a magpie's noisy chattering. The soft twittering of the titmice sounded timidly. Then the frost hardened and everything grew still. The air began to hum with the cold.

One morning a dog's baying broke the silence.

It was a continuous hurrying bay that pressed on quickly through the woods, eager and clear and harrying with loud yelps.

Bambi raised his head in the hollow under the fallen tree, and looked at the old stag who was lying beside him.

"That's nothing," said the old stag in answer to Bambi's glance, "nothing that need bother us."

Still they both listened.

They lay in their hollow with the old beech trunk like a sheltering roof above them. The deep snow kept the icy draught from them, and the tangled bushes hid them from curious eyes.

The baying grew nearer. It was angry and panting and relentless. It sounded like the bark of a small hound. It came constantly closer.

Then they heard panting of another kind. They heard a low labored snarling under the angry barking. Bambi grew uneasy, but

the old stag quieted him again. "We don't need to worry about it," he said. They lay silent in their warm hollow and peered out.

The footsteps drew nearer and nearer through the branches. The snow dropped from the shaken boughs and clouds of it rose from the earth.

Through the snow and over the roots and branches, the fox came springing, crouching and slinking. They were right; a little, short-legged hound was after him.

One of the fox's forelegs was crushed and the fur torn around it. He held his shattered paw in front of him, and blood poured from his wound. He was gasping for breath. His eyes were staring with terror and exertion. He was beside himself with rage and fear. He was desperate and exhausted.

Once in a while he would face around and snarl so that the dog was startled and would fall back a few steps.

Presently the fox sat down on his haunches. He could go no farther. Raising his mangled forepaw pitifully, with his jaws open and his lips drawn back, he snarled at the dog.

But the dog was never silent for a minute. His high, rasping bark only grew fuller and deeper. "Here," he yapped, "here he is! Here! Here! Here!" He was not abusing the fox. He was not even speaking to him, but was urging on someone who was still far behind.

Bambi knew as well as the old stag did that it was He the dog was calling.

The fox knew it too. The blood was streaming down from him and fell from his breast into the snow, making a fiery red spot on the icy, white surface, and steaming slowly.

A weakness overcame the fox. His crushed foot sank down helpless, but a burning pain shot through it when it touched the cold snow. He lifted it again with an effort and held it quivering in front of him.

“Let me go,” said the fox beginning to speak, “let me go.” He spoke softly and beseechingly. He was quite weak and despondent.

“No! No! No!” the dog howled.

The fox pleaded still more insistently. “We're relations,” he pleaded, “we're brothers almost. Let me go home. Let me die with my family at least. We're brothers almost, you and I.”

“No! No! No!” the dog raged.

Then the fox rose so that he was sitting perfectly erect. He dropped his handsome pointed muzzle on his bleeding breast, raised his eyes and looked the dog straight in the face. In a completely altered voice, restrained and embittered, he growled, “Aren't you ashamed, you traitor!”

“No! No! No!” yelled the dog.

But the fox went on, “You turncoat, you renegade.” His maimed body was taut with contempt and hatred. “You spy,” he hissed, “you blackguard, you track us where He could never find us. You betray us, your own relations, me who am almost your brother. And you stand there and aren't ashamed!”

Instantly many other voices sounded loudly round about.

“Traitor!” cried the magpie from the tree.

“Spy!” shrieked the jay.

“Blackguard!” the weasel hissed.

“Renegade!” snarled the ferret.

From every tree and bush came chirpings, peepings, shrill cries, while overhead the crows cawed, “Spy! Spy!” Everyone had rushed up, and from the trees or from safe hiding places on the ground, they watched the contest. The fury that had burst from the fox released an embittered anger in them all. And the blood spilt on the snow, that steamed before their eyes, maddened them and made them forget all caution.

The dog stared around him. “Who are you?” he yelped. “What do you want? What do you know about it? What are you talking about? Everything belongs to Him, just as I do. But I, I love Him. I worship Him, I serve Him. Do you think you can oppose Him, poor creatures like you? He's all-powerful. He's above all of you. Everything we have comes from Him. Everything that lives or grows comes from Him.” The dog was quivering with exaltation.

“Traitor!” cried the squirrel shrilly.

“Yes, traitor!” hissed the fox. “Nobody is a traitor but you, only you.”

The dog was dancing about in a frenzy of devotion. “Only me?” he cried, “you lie. Aren't there many, many others on His side? The

horse, the cow, the sheep, the chickens, many, many of you and your kind are on His side and worship Him and serve Him.”

“They're rabble!” snarled the fox, full of a boundless contempt.

Then the dog could contain himself no longer and sprang at the fox's throat. Growling, spitting and yelping, they rolled in the snow, a writhing, savagely snapping mass from which fur flew. The snow rose in clouds and was spattered with fine drops of blood. At last the fox could not fight any more. In a few seconds he was lying on his back, his white belly uppermost. He twitched and stiffened and died.

The dog shook him a few times, then let him fall on the trampled snow. He stood beside him, his legs planted, calling in a deep, loud voice, “Here! Here! He's here!”

The others were horror-struck and fled in all directions.

“Dreadful,” said Bambi softly to the old stag in the hollow.

“The most dreadful part of all,” the old stag answered, “is that the dogs believe what the hound just said. They believe it, they pass their lives in fear, they hate Him and themselves and yet they'd die for His sake.”

CHAPTER XXIV

The cold broke, and there was a warm spell in the middle of the winter. The earth drank great draughts of the melting snows so that wide stretches of soil were everywhere visible. The blackbirds were not singing yet, but when they flew from the ground where they were hunting worms, or when they fluttered from tree to tree, they uttered a long-drawn joyous whistle that was almost a song. The woodpecker began to chatter now and then. Magpies and crows grew more talkative. The titmice chirped more cheerily. And the pheasants, swooping down from their roosts, would stand in one spot preening their feathers and uttering their metallic throaty cacklings.

One such morning Bambi was roaming around as usual. In the gray dawn he came to the edge of the hollow. On the farther side where he had lived before something was stirring. Bambi stayed hidden in the thicket and peered across. A deer was wandering slowly to and fro, looking for places where the snow had melted, and cropping whatever grasses had sprung up so early.

Bambi wanted to turn at once and go away, for he recognized Faline. His first impulse was to spring forward and call her. But he stood as though rooted to the spot. He had not seen Faline for a long time. His heart began to beat faster. Faline moved slowly as though she were tired and sad. She resembled her mother now. She looked as old as Aunt Ena, as Bambi noticed with a strangely pained surprise.

Faline lifted her head and gazed across as though she sensed his presence. Again Bambi started forward, but he stopped again, hesitating and unable to stir.

He saw that Faline had grown old and gray.

“Gay, pert little Faline, how lovely she used to be,” he thought, “and how lively!” His whole youth suddenly flashed before his eyes. The meadow, the trails where he walked with his mother, the happy games with Gobo and Faline, the nice grasshoppers and butterflies, the fight with Karus and Ronno when he had won Faline for his own. He felt happy again, and yet he trembled.

Faline wandered on, her head drooped to the ground, walking slowly, sadly and wearily away. At that moment Bambi loved her with an overpowering, tender melancholy. He wanted to rush through the hollow that separated him from the others. He wanted to overtake her, to talk with her, to talk to her about their youth and about everything that had happened.

He gazed after her as she went off, passing under the bare branches till finally she was lost to sight.

He stood there a long time staring after her.

Then there was a crash like thunder. Bambi shrank together. It came from where he was standing. Not even from a little way off but right beside him.

Then there was a second thunderclap, and right after that another.

Bambi leaped a little farther into the thicket, then stopped and

listened. Everything was still. He glided stealthily homewards.

The old stag was there before him. He had not lain down yet, but was standing beside the fallen beech trunk expectantly.

“Where have you been so long?” he asked so seriously that Bambi grew silent.

“Did you hear it?” the old stag went on after a pause.

“Yes,” Bambi answered, “three times. He must be in the woods.”

“Of course,” the old stag nodded, and repeated with a peculiar intonation, “He is in the woods and we must go.”

“Where?” the word escaped Bambi.

“Where He is now,” said the old stag, and his voice was solemn.

Bambi was terrified.

“Don't be frightened,” the old stag went on, “come with me and don't be frightened. I'm glad that I can take you and show you the way....” He hesitated and added softly, “before I go.”

Bambi looked wonderingly at the old stag. And suddenly he noticed how aged he looked. His head was completely gray now. His face was perfectly gaunt. The deep light was extinguished in his eyes, and they had a feeble, greenish luster and seemed to be blind.

Bambi and the old stag had not gone far before they caught the first whiff of that acrid smell that sent such dread and terror to their

hearts.

Bambi stopped. But the old stag went on directly towards the scent. Bambi followed hesitantly.

The terrifying scent grew stronger and stronger. But the old stag kept on without stopping. The idea of flight sprang up in Bambi's mind and tugged at his heart. It seethed through his mind and body, and nearly swept him away. But he kept a firm grip on himself and stayed close behind the old stag.

Then the horrible scent grew so strong that it drowned out everything else, and it was hardly possible to breathe.

“Here He is,” said the old stag moving to one side.

Through the bare branches, Bambi saw him lying on the trampled snow a few steps away.

An irresistible burst of terror swept over Bambi and with a sudden bound he started to give in to his impulse to flee.

“Halt!” he heard the old stag calling. Bambi looked around and saw the stag standing calmly where He was lying on the ground. Bambi was amazed and, moved by a sense of obedience, a boundless curiosity and quivering expectancy, he went closer.

“Come near,” said the old stag, “don't be afraid.”

He was lying with His pale, naked face turned upwards, His hat a little to one side on the snow. Bambi who did not know anything about hats, thought His horrible head was split in two. The poacher's shirt, open at the neck, was pierced where a wound gaped

like a small red mouth. Blood was oozing out slowly. Blood was drying on His hair and around His nose. A big pool of it lay on the snow which was melting from the warmth.

“We can stand right beside Him,” the old stag began softly, “and it isn't dangerous.”

Bambi looked down at the prostrate form whose limbs and skin seemed so mysterious and terrible to him. He gazed at the dead eyes that stared up sightlessly at him. Bambi couldn't understand it all.

“Bambi,” the old stag went on, “do you remember what Gobo said and what the dog said, what they all think, do you remember?”

Bambi could not answer.

“Do you see, Bambi,” the old stag went on, “do you see how He's lying there dead, like one of us? Listen, Bambi. He isn't all-powerful as they say. Everything that lives and grows doesn't come from Him. He isn't above us. He's just the same as we are. He has the same fears, the same needs, and suffers in the same way. He can be killed like us, and then He lies helpless on the ground like all the rest of us, as you see Him now.”

There was a silence.

“Do you understand me, Bambi?” asked the old stag.

“I think so,” Bambi said in a whisper.

“Then speak,” the old stag commanded.

Bambi was inspired, and said trembling, "There is Another who is over us all, over us and over Him."

"Now I can go," said the old stag.

He turned away, and they wandered side by side for a stretch.

Presently the old stag stopped in front of a tall oak. "Don't follow me any further, Bambi," he began with a calm voice, "my time is up. Now I have to look for a resting place."

Bambi tried to speak.

"Don't," said the old stag cutting him short, "don't. In the hour which I am approaching we are all alone. Good-by, my son. I loved you dearly."

CHAPTER XXV

Dawn of the summer's day came hot, without a breath of wind or the usual morning chill. The sun seemed to come up faster than usual. It rose swiftly and flashed like a torch with dazzling rays.

The dew on the meadows and bushes was drawn up in an instant. The earth was perfectly dry so that the clods crumbled. The forest had been still from an early hour. Only a woodpecker hammered now and then, or the doves cooed their tireless, fervid tenderness.

Bambi was standing in a little clearing, forming a narrow glade in the heart of the thicket.

A swarm of midges danced and hummed around his head in the warm sunshine.

There was a low buzzing among the leaves of the hazel bushes near Bambi, and a big may-beetle crawled out and flew slowly by. He flew among the midges, up and up, till he reached tree-top where he intended to sleep till evening. His wing-covers folded down hard and neatly and his wings vibrated with strength.

The midges divided to let the may-beetle pass through and closed behind him again. His dark brown body, over which shone the vibrant glassy shimmer of his whirring wings, flashed for a moment in the sunshine as he disappeared.

“Did you see him?” the midges asked each other.

“That's the old may-beetle,” some of them hummed.

Others said, “All of his offspring are dead. Only one is still alive. Only one.”

“How long will he live?” a number of midges asked.

The others answered, “We don't know. Some of his offspring live a long time. They live forever almost.... They see the sun thirty or forty times, we don't know exactly how many. Our lives are long enough, but we see the daylight only once or twice.”

“How long has the old beetle been living?” some very small midges asked.

“He has outlived his whole family. He's as old as the hills, as old as the hills. He's seen more and been through more in this world than we can even imagine.”

Bambi walked on. “Midge buzzings,” he thought, “midge buzzings.”

A delicate frightened call came to his ears.

He listened and went closer, perfectly softly, keeping among the thickest bushes, and moving noiselessly as he had long known to do.

The call came again, more urgent, more plaintively. Fawns' voices were wailing, “Mother! Mother!”

Bambi glided through the bushes and followed the calls.

Two fawns were standing side by side, in their little red coats, a

brother and sister, forsaken and despondent.

“Mother! Mother!” they called.

Before they knew what had happened Bambi was standing in front of them. They stared at him speechlessly.

“Your mother has no time for you now,” said Bambi severely.

He looked into the little brother's eyes. “Can't you stay by yourself?” he asked.

The little brother and sister were silent.

Bambi turned and, gliding into the bushes, disappeared before they had come to their senses. He walked along.

“The little fellow pleases me,” he thought, “perhaps I'll meet him again when he's larger....”

He walked along. “The little girl is nice too,” he thought, “Faline looked like that when she was a fawn.”

He went on, and vanished in the forest.